BILLY *and* THE MAJOR

Larry Brigman
Christmas 1955

Billy and the Major

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Billy and the Major

BY

EMMA SPEED SAMPSON

A Sequel to

"Miss Minerva and William Green Hill"

Illustrated by

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The Reilly & Lee Co.

CHICAGO

Billy and the Major

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Mrs. Major Minerva	11
II	Wilkes Booth Lincoln	24
III	Befriending the Heathen	46
IV	The Major Peruses Around	61
V	Salute Your Brides	71
VI	Signals of Distress	91
VII	Billy Green Hill	112
VIII	A Right Sweet Cuss	124
IX	Mr. Carroll of Baltimore Row	146
X	Aunt Cindy Comes	158
XI	Christian Zions	171
XII	The Whiskered William	187
XIII	Whooping Cough School	201
XIV	Letters to Santa Claus	214
XV	Christmas Morning	232
XVI	Jimmy in the Banister	243
XVII	The Major's Gallantry	256
XVIII	A Respectable Goat	268
XIX	Miss Minerva's Baby	287

BILLY AND THE MAJOR

CHAPTER I

MRS. MAJOR MINERVA

IMMY, this sho' is a 'diculous world er sin an' sorrer," announced Billy to his chum Jimmy Garner. "It don't seem mo'n yestiddy since Aunt Minerva was a waitin' fer me to come a drivin' up with Sam Lamb in the bus, that time I quit the plantation and come to live to her house; an' here I is a waitin' fer her an' Major to come off'n they alls honeybeemoon."

"Oh, Billy Hill, 'tain't no honeybeemoon! It's jes a honeymoon. You all time callin' things honeybeemoons," was Jimmy's scornful rejoinder.

"Well, if'n they's honey they mus' be

some bees. 'Sides, I done heard that long-legged, red-headed hopper-grass, Maurice Richmond, what married my Miss Cecilia, a sayin' that in his 'pinion the Major was a goin' to git stung. I sho' do hope Major won't git stung."

"Don't you hope Miss Minerva don't neither?"

"Well, you see po' Aunt Minerva might live to git rheumatiz an' I's her own dear nephew an' I ain't a goin' to wish nothin' on her to hoodoo her—an' yo' know bee stings is a sho' cure fer rheumatiz. That's what Aunt Cindy says. I wisht I could see Aunt Cindy. She been a keepin' keer er me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln ever since we's born. I sho' do love nigger chillun! When white chillun plays with niggers they knows how to give up—the niggers do, I mean. Wilkes Booth Lincoln an' me ain't had no fuss since we's born."

"Mama says," broke in Jimmy, "last Monday when the Aid Society met that nobody talked 'bout nothin' but Miss Minerva an' the Major. They plum forgot the heathen an' how they's goin' to raise money fer new steps goin' up in the steeple so's the sextum kin ting-a-ling the bell. The sextum done 'clared hisse'f as 'posed ter clammin' up that ol' broken ladder no mo'."

"I was sho' disappointed 'bout Aunt Minerva not gittin' married in church. It looked kinder sneaky like fer her jes' to have the preacher come a walkin' in like he was 'vited to supper, 'cep'n they wa'nt no fried chicken an' Sally Lum, an' befo' yo' could say 'Jack Robinson!' there she were married. I'm gonter be pow'ful glad to see Aunt Minerva an' Major Minerva."

William Green Hill's voice sounded a little wistful. He was homesick for his Aunt Minerva. The whirlwind ending of the

Major's long and patient wooing had taken the town off its feet, as well as Miss Minerva. It had grown accustomed to viewing the Major as a rejected, though not a dejected suitor, and Miss Minerva as a confirmed old maid—a man-hater, in fact. The wedding had been discussed at many gatherings besides the Ladies' Aid. It was generally agreed that the Major was to be pitied.

While the bride and groom were off on their short wedding trip Billy had been left in care of Mrs. Maurice Richmond, whom the child had finally forgiven for jilting him and marrying the promising young banker. He had even a carefully concealed liking for the once despised Maurice.

"His head ain't so turrible red in the dark an' he is sho' strong in his muscles and treatified," was the little boy's verdict.

In spite of Miss Cecilia's loving kindness, the week of his aunt's absence had passed

slowly for Billy, and now that she was on her way home, he realized how much he had missed her.

"Th' ain't nothin' mean 'bout Aunt Minerva, nothin' sneaky," he told Jimmy Garner. "I betcher if Aunt Minerva was fat like Major Minerva, folks wouldn't be near so scairt of her. Fat folks is so soft to bump up against that you forgits all about they innards. Sometimes I reckon they is jes' as hard on they innards as skinny ones."

"My Mama's fat an' sof', but she can hit as hard as nails. She done spanked me with the brush turned the wrong way t'other day an' it sho' did sting on my meat. 'Twas one of them bristly brushes. I been a wearin' out mo' shoe leather than I is pants ever since she made the mistake," declared Jimmy, squirming in remembrance.

"Here comes Sam Lamb!" cried Billy, jumping up and down in excitement. "Ain't

grown-ups funny not to ride up on the box with Sam Lamb when they ain't nobody to stop 'em? Maybe though Aunt Minerva won't let Major Minerva git up there."

"Miss Minerva's all time 'fraid her little old Major's gonter git hurt," sneered Jimmy.

The grinning Sam drew his horses up with a flourish, waving his whip at the little boys waiting by Miss Minerva's gate. The Major handed out his blushing bride. She really was blushing and smiling. For a moment Billy did not recognize her, and the terrible thought came over him that the Major had got mixed up and brought home some stranger. Her voice reassured him, however. It had the same note of command as she sharply directed Sam Lamb to carry in her luggage.

"Have you been a good boy?" had a familiar and unmistakable ring to it too, as the bride stooped to embrace her nephew.

"I ain't been so pious since me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln's born."

"Hello, boys!" and the Major shook hands with Billy and Jimmy. Billy had harbored a nameless fear that when that gentleman married into the family, he might feel called upon to kiss his wife's nephew. If that should be the case, he was thankful for his new relative's plump softness. It would be nicer to kiss a fat man than a skinny one. He sincerely hoped there would be no kissing at all in the new arrangement.

"When he feels like kissin' I hope he'll take it out on Aunt Minerva," was his devout prayer. The friendly, manly handshake went straight to the boy's heart. He might have known he could trust the Major.

He followed his aunt into the house a little shyly.

"Ain't you got on some new clothes, Aunt Minerva?"

"Yes, William, I did some shopping in Louisville."

"They sho' is pretty. They mus' have mo' goods to spare up in Lou'ville than what they is in Tennessee. You don't look near so slimiky as you did fo' you got to be Mrs. Major."

Miss Minerva smiled at her nephew as she took off her hat. Such a pretty hat it was with fluffy trimming. Billy, remembering the hard, close bonnet that his aunt had gone away in, looked on the new headgear with reverence and astonishment. Perhaps it was responsible for the subtle change in its wearer. He glanced from the stylish, fluffy hat to his aunt.

"Good Gawd! Aunt Minerva, is you got on a wig?"

"William Green Hill! Such a word!"

"Wig ain't no bad word!"

"You said 'Good God,'" sternly.

"That ain't no bad word, Aunt Minerva. God is the goodest word they is."

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain."

"It wa'nt in vain. I were in cross my heart an' die earnes'. I was kinder scairt when I fust seen you in yo' wig."

"It is not a wig!" indignantly. "I have always had a fine head of hair. I have merely changed the arrangement of it."

"Well, 'scuse me, Aunt Minerva. I sho' do think it is pretty, mos' as pretty as a wig. You see, when I's 'customed to seein' you look kinder like a skint rabbit, an' you ain't been gone but a week, an' you comes back a lookin' like a little fluffy chicken, it was kinder confusium. I hope I ain't done put you out the very fust thing," wistfully.

"No, my dear, it is all right," in a voice almost gentle.

That first supper after the return of the

bride and groom was a happy one for the little boy. The Major was a genial person and his good humor seemed to have rubbed off on Miss Minerva. Billy was on his good behavior and his aunt had to correct him only five times during the meal.

Cooking was Miss Minerva's long suit and feeding the hungry was her chief pleasure in life. She smiled over the coffee pot at these two male creatures that had recently been forced into her life by Fate, and then looked with satisfaction at the rapidly diminishing pile of golden brown waffles between them.

"Have another, Bi —William," she corrected herself quickly. She had capitulated to the fascination of feeding these two men things and almost called her nephew Billy, but not quite.

"Thank you, Aunt Minerva, but I's done full up. I don't really want what I et, but they sho' is good."

"Delicious! delicious!" put in the Major before his wife had time to correct Billy for his inelegance.

Miss Minerva left the dining room for a hot batch. Billy, taking advantage of her absence, scraped up some slippery and delectable morsel with his knife, conveying it to his mouth with that tabooed implement.

He caught the Major's eye just as he landed it safely. He sat glued to the spot, mouth wide open and knife protruding as though he were a sword swallower who had been arrested in the midst of his performance.

The Major winked! Billy winked back! That act sealed the compact. Forever after, they were two men banded against one woman.

"When you gonter git me my pony, Major?"

"Ahem! Your aunt is afraid for you to begin with a pony, Billy, and so for the time being—only the time being, my boy—I am going to compromise on a goat."

"A little waggin, too?"

"Yes, and you can hitch up the goat and take Jimmy and Lina and Frances riding. I reckon you would like that even better than a pony without a cart."

"Ye—es! Maybe—but Major, let's git a

Billy goat, not a Nanny. We've got enough women folks around here."

"All right, Billy, a he-goat it shall be. I'll buy him as soon as a good one can be found, a wagon and harness, too."

"Say Major, when you was on yo' honeymoon, did you git stung? I was kinder 'fraid you would."

"No, my boy, not at all," declared the intrepid fighter of Yankees and Indians. "I am perfectly satisfied."

CHAPTER II

WILKES BOOTH LINCOLN

THE Major's belongings had been moved to Miss Minerva's house, much to the delight of Billy. He loved to loll in the great soft leather chairs and lie on the Persian rugs, pretending to read the fascinating looking books whose backs gave one the same feeling that the rugs and chairs did. He loved the mixed odor of leather and tobacco that hung around the Major and his possessions.

Miss Minerva's house was the pink of neatness but the austerity of her disposition had expression in her belongings. Her chairs were hard and straight; her carpets durable, with stern, decided geometric patterns uncompromisingly woven in the fabrics; her

few books were of a religious or educational order, bound in hard boards with gilt edges.

The Major had spent his long bachelorhood in two great rooms in the old hotel and these he had furnished luxuriously according to his taste and nature. Before his bride would allow a single thing to be carried in her chaste abode she brushed and scoured and beat it.

"You'd better be keerful, Aunt Minerva, or you'll take all the good smell out the Major's furnisher," admonished Billy.

"Good smell!" sniffed Mrs. Major. "I can't smell anything but dust and tobacco."

"Can't you smell that kinder manified smell? I think its the goodest smell they is. I's sho' glad we's gonter have a smell like that to our house. Ain't you glad, Aunt Minerva?"

That lady went on digging in the leather upholstery with a kerosene rag and did not

answer her nephew's query, nor did she glance in his direction.

"Aunt Minerva, ain't you gonter fix yo' hair up fuzzy—like in the mornin' no mo'?"

"I don't have time," snapped Miss Minerva, putting her hand up regretfully to her hair, stretched back straight from her high forehead in the prenuptial style.

"I think the Major likes yo' hair done up fluffy duck," insisted Billy.

"How do you know what he likes? Has he said so?"

"No, he ain't said nothin', but me'n the Major kin tell what us alls is a thinkin' 'thout talkin'."

"Getting breakfast in time is more important than fluffing up my hair," was all Aunt Minerva would say, but Billy's remark had set her thinking.

The first disagreement had arisen between the newly-wedded pair. The Major wanted

to employ a servant and his wife insisted upon keeping to her habit of doing her own housework.

"It isn't as though we were poor," gently argued the Major. "I should be mortified to own that I had spent forty years in the practice of law and had not laid by something."

"I don't do it for economy. I simply can't bear a negress in my kitchen. They are a wasteful, slovenly lot, and besides I have my ways—"

"So have I, my dear—so have I. I can't bear to see you so hard-worked and I believe a good woman can be found who could cook —not as well as you can, of course—but you might show her."

"I have never seen a negress yet who could be taught anything."

"Aunt Cindy is a jim-dandy cook," put in Billy. "She used to make me'n Wilkes Booth

Lincoln the bestes fried pies an' things."

"Do you think she would be willing to leave the plantation and come and cook for us?" asked the Major.

"Sho' she would! She is a grievin' for me all the time an'—an'— I'd be mighty mollified to see her'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln."

"Well, I don't want any of them on my place," declared Mrs. Major, sternly.

"That's where we differ," laughed her genial husband. "I'd like to own a dozen or so slaves right now."

The Major was engaged in assisting his wife with her churning. His chubby form was enveloped in a great apron. He had carried the cream from the dairy, poured it into the churn, and was vigorously pumping up and down with the dasher.

"Not so hard, Joseph!" admonished Mrs. Major. "A slow even stroke is better. Let me show you—if you must help, you might

as well do it right. I don't really need your assistance."

Billy looked on in amazement. Was this *his* Major actually doing the work of a woman, and doing it because he wanted to and not because Aunt Minerva made him? When he saw his idol with the great apron tied under his rosy, clean-shaven chin he thought for a moment he had escaped from the barber's chair, and could hardly believe his eyes when that rotund gentleman brought in the cream and began to ply the dasher.

"Maje, does you like to churn?" he asked when his aunt went out of the kitchen for a moment.

"Why, no, my son, I can't say that I do like it, but I don't want your Aunt Minerva to have so much heavy work to do. I am afraid that my being here doubles her labors, and I feel that I must help her until she consents to get a servant."

"Aunt Minerva is a stingaree for work, Maje. She don't know how to play nohow. One time I churned for Aunt Minerva, but I straddled the dasher an' pertended it was a wild horse I was a ridin'. That makes it mo' run. I reckon you couldn't set straddled on 'count of yo' fatty fat tum tum."

"I'm afraid not!" and the newly-wed proceeded to ply the dasher.

"Ain't you a goin' to yo' office to-day, Maje?"

"As soon as the butter comes. We men have a hard time, eh, Billy? I wish I owned a good nigger." The Major's face was pinker from the unusual exercise.

Billy joined Jimmy at the swing where they sat and played mumble-the-peg.

"What is slaves, Jimmy?"

"Slaves is niggers that you hitch up to ploughs an' drive. An' you beats 'em, an' sells 'em down the river, an' cuts they babies

in two, an' smears the blood on the front door, an' when the giant comes a climbin' down the gourd vine he says: 'Fee, fi, fo, fum!' I knows all about slaves, 'cause Miss Cecilia, she 'splained to me—an'—an'— the mo' Miss Cecilia gits married the bosser 'splainer she gits to be."

"Do you reckon the Major would cut Wilkes Booth Lincoln in two an' smear his blood?"

"'Co'se he would! Ain't the Major fit an' fit 'til he los' his toe a tryin' to keep the nigger 'Gyptians in slavery?" and Jimmy rolled his eyes until only the whites showed, an accomplishment which he had only recently acquired.

"But the Major is so kind an' good," objected Billy.

"Sho' he is kind an' good to white folkses, but I betcher he'd be something turrible if he got his hands on niggers."

"Sam Lamb likes the Major. He ain't scairt of him."

"Ain't scairt yo' grandmother! Sam Lamb is scairt to death of him. One time I was down to the libbery stable an' the Major comed along an' jes' 'cause his buggy wa'n't hitched up to suit him, he tol' Sam Lamb he war a black rascil an' he wa'n't wuth shootin'. Sam Lamb war jes' a shakin' with scairts."

"Maybe Sam Lamb was jes' a laughin. He sho' do shake his tummy when he laughs. It jes' trimbles," suggested Billy.

"Laughin' nothin'! You all time sayin' Sam Lamb was a laughin' when he's nearly bustin' hisse'f open with scairts."

"Bob White! Bob White!" came in a soft whistle from the hedge.

"Listen, Jimmy! That's a pa'tridge. Me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln been a hearin' pa'tridges ever since we's born. That's the way

we calls each other down on the plantation. Jes' like this: Bob White! Bob White!"

"Bob White! Bob White!" came again from the hedge.

"Ain't he tame? I wisht I had some salt—I bet I could ketch him. Le's creep up, Jimmy, an' see can't we lay han's on him."

"There come ol' Lina an' Frances! They all time scarin' off our birds. Hi there, go back! You Lina an' Frances, go back!" Jimmy waved his arms frantically, shouting out loud enough to scare off a dodo bird.

"Go back yourself! This isn't your yard. What business have you turning comp'ny out of Miss Minerva Major's yard?" demanded Frances.

"We have more right in there than you have," declared Lina, "'cause my mother says that Major Minerva is second cousin once removed from my grandmother." The children had christened the long suffering Ma-

jor "Major Minerva." His wife was known as "Miss Minerva Major."

"Well, Billy an' me had 'most ketched a whole herd er pa'tridges when you all time come an' shoo 'em off."

"Nonsense! There are no partridges in towns and cities," was Lina's scornful reply to Jimmy's charge.

The little girls seated themselves on the bench by the swing and got out their spool knitting.

"Bob White! Bob White!" came with shrill sweetness from the hedge.

"Bob White! Bob White!" answered Billy.

The little boy's big blue eyes were shining and his mouth trembled a little as he jumped out of the swing and darted to the spot in the thick hedge where the tame bird seemed to have taken up its abode.

His companions looked on in amazement

WM. DONAHEY

when he pulled from the hiding place, not a speckled partridge, but a little colored boy, ragged, dirty and forlorn.

"Wilkes Booth Lincoln! Wilkes Booth Lincoln!" and the black and white mingled in a long embrace.

"Billy! Billy! Li'l Billy! I's grieved mase'f mos' ter deaf studyin' 'bout yer."

The boys rolled on the ground locked in each other's arms.

"I missed you right smart, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, you an' Aunt Cindy an' Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter an' all Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's chilluns an' ev'body. Is yo' all enjoyin' good health?"

"My mammy is been po'ly," said the little darkey solemnly. "She done perjuced twinses, spite er de hoodoo Doc Schacklefoot done put on her. Doc Shacklefoot done said whin he name de las' baby Decimus Ultimus dat he cas' a spell on Mammy an' dey

wouldn't never be no mo' chilluns in de cabin, but I reckon Doc Shacklefoot ain't no good at hoodooin' 'cause they is sho' twinses thar now."

"I wisht I could see 'em! What she done called 'em? asked Billy, much excited over the news.

"She done named 'em Postle Peter and Pistle Paul."

"I tell yer Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline is sho a stingaree fer namin' kids. How you git here? Did you ride on the train an' then git in the bus with Sam Lamb, the way I done?"

"No, bless de Lawd! I comed by de high road. I hitched on de back er waggins an' walked, an' clum up in hay mows, an' crep' on quite a piece in a ox cart. I been a comin' two nights an' a day. I sho is hongry."

"Come right in an' Aunt Minerva will give you plenty to eat, an' I reckon the but-

ter's done come, an' you kin have some buttermilk, what the Major is done chur—" Billy stopped midway in his words. He glanced at the swing where his white friends were seated, looking on in stony silence at his reception of his dear Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

"Jimmee! Aw, Jimmee!" he called "Come here!"

Jimmy left the little girls and strode with dignity across the lawn.

"Jimmy, do yo' reckon the Major would do anything to Wilkes Booth Lincoln? I mean smear his blood or make him a slave or somethin'—"

"Would he? I betcher Major Minerva would cut him in two an' sqush his innards all aroun' an'—an' make him mix up plasterin' 'thout no hog hair in it an'—an' —when it wouldn't stick he'd—he'd—" Imagination failing, he whistled and turned

up his eyes until only the whites showed, suggesting more terrible things than mere words could possibly convey.

"Gimme room! Gimme room!" cried the little darkey. "I'll put my foot in de pike back to de plantation. My mammy gonter war me out fer runnin' away, but that ain't nothin' ter what dis here Majle kin do."

Billy held on to him, loathe to lose his old friend so recently taken back to his faithful little bosom.

"Wait, please, wait! Lina, you an' Frances please come an' 'vise with me," pleaded Billy. Lina and Frances had followed Jimmy, and stood a few yards off looking with evident disapproval at the ragged, dirty little colored boy.

"What can we do?" asked Lina, sedately, much appeased by the fact that she was being asked to advise somebody of the male persuasion. The little girls had whispered to-

gether in the swing that their mothers would not let them play with dirty little colored boys, nor would they be allowed to play with Billy if he was going to hug dirty little colored boys and roll on the grass with them. Jimmy had been undergoing severe pangs of jealousy over poor Wilkes Booth Lincoln. Evidently Billy had gone back on his white friends.

"You see, me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln is been a playin' together an' sleepin' in the same room an' ev'ything ever since we's born, an' we is been a missin' each other so bad that Wilkes Booth Lincoln up an' runned away from Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline, the same as is his mammy, 'cause she done had twinses name Postle Peter an' Pistle Paul, an' when they is mo' babies down to they cabin Wilkes Booth Lincoln's life is plum pestered out er him—an' 'sides he was a grievin' after me. Now

he is done comed here an' Jimmy thinks Major would want to make a 'Gyptian slave of him an'—"

"Nonsense!" said Lina, hotly. "Major Minerva is my grandmother's second cousin once removed from her, and, besides, is a perfect gentleman."

"Gentleman yo' grandmother!" broke in Jimmy, rudely. "Didn't Major Minerva bus' his toe a kickin' niggers an' didn't he fit an' fit a tryin' to keep them in jangling chains of slavery?"

"He did say only this mornin' that he wished he owned a dozen or so slaves, an' he never said what he wanted to do with them," said Billy, gloomily.

"There now, what'd I tell you?" jeered Jimmy triumphantly. "Lina, you an' Frances all time thinkin' you so smart."

"But you see po' Wilkes Booth Lincoln is hungry an' tired, an' I don't want him to go

back to the plantation an' have to spend his life a tendin' the twinses," wailed Billy, his eyes filling with tears.

"I tell you what le's do!" exclaimed Frances. "Le's hide him an' feed him an' clothe him an' educate him."

"I reckon my mother wouldn't mind if I did good," said Lina, primly. "She wouldn't like me to play with a little negro boy, but she would think it my duty to be a foreign missionary to him."

"Where can he sleep?" asked Jimmy.

"In the woodhouse, of course! They's a attic up over it where Aunt Minerva sto's her plunder. They's a little broken down bed an' all up there. Come on, quick, befo' the Major gits through churnin' an' goes to his law office," and Billy caught hold of his little black friend's hand and scurried to the haven of the woodhouse, the other children following in a state of wild excitement.

A bed-chamber was quickly contrived by the girls while Wilkes Booth Lincoln stood patiently by. Billy and Jimmy had gone on a foraging expedition for their starving protégé.

They were back in a few moments, laden with spoils. Jimmy had a pone of cornbread that Sarah Jane had put aside for her own offspring, little Bennie Dick. Billy had a handful of cookies and a mug of buttermilk.

"I'll do better'n this jes' as soon as Aunt Minerva goes in to dust the parlor. Aunt Minerva is sho fond of feedin' folks an' she all time gives me all I kin stuff, but I ain't long been thru breakfast, an' she might 'spicion something if I ask for eatin's now. I reckon I'd better steal."

"The Bible says it's wrong to steal. It says so in the commandments," objected Lina.

"'Tain't Sunday," broke in Jimmy. "The

Bible says, Remember the Sabbath Day, not to commit no stealin', an' Miss Cecilia 'splained to me how the Sabbath Day was Sunday. 'Taint no harm to steal when you is hungry, 'cause didn't Jesus steal a ox an' roast it in a pit on Sunday?"

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was not at all interested in this discussion, but fell to on the delectable corn pone with the natural appetite of a boy who had spent two nights and a day on the road with no regular meals. His fear of the terrible Major had passed. He had no idea what a major was, but if Billy said he was safe he knew it was so. Billy had taken the lead always and it was not for the little colored boy to dispute his authority. The beautiful white children were making a place for him to sleep, and had promised to find him something more to eat. What more could he want? His eyes had once more beheld his idol, Billy, and he was happy.

"I's so plum tuckered out I reckon I'll snatch a lil res'," he murmured as he finished the last crumb of cookies washed down by the last drop of buttermilk. The poor tired little fellow dropped asleep on the bed the girls had prepared for him and the four white children tiptoed out of the attic room, quite awed by the responsibility they had taken on their youthful shoulders.

CHAPTER III

BEFRIENDING THE HEATHEN

ILLY was very quiet at dinner, so quiet that the Major looked at him in wonder.

"What is it, son?"

"What's what?" asked Billy, waking from a revery.

"What makes you so quiet?"

"I ain't got nothin' to say—an'—an' I'm jes' a sayin' it." The Major smiled, but Billy refused to smile back. The thought rankled in his mind that his beloved Maje might catch his little black friend and smear his blood.

The Major felt that something was worrying his partner, but what it was he could not divine. Certainly nothing was the matter with his appetite. Billy ate steadily on and

when his plate was scraped clean he held it up with great appealing eyes, and said:

"Aunt Minerva, everythin' - all - over, please!"

"Why, child, you are certainly hungry to-day, I am so glad."

"Yessum, but yo' victuals—I mean yo' eatin's is sho tasty." Aunt Minerva was trying to break her nephew of the habit of using the vulgar expressions picked up on the plantation. "Victuals" was a word she could not abide, and it was one the little boy had the hardest time giving up.

"I didn't mean to say victuals, Aunt Minerva, but when vi—, eatin's is so tasty an' hefty-like it seems like victuals means mo' than jes' plain eatin's."

"I think he is right, my dear," said the Major. "It seems a pity that such a good expressive word as victuals should have fallen into disrepute."

Billy helped himself plentifully on the second time around, his aunt looking on in amazement as he piled his plate full.

"I think you will not be able to eat all of that food, William," she said admonishingly, and remember, if you take more than you can eat, what my rule is: you have it for the next meal."

"Yessum!" Billy's eyes were full of laughter. He had grown accustomed to seeking the Major's approval when he had a joke that he wished to share and he instinctively glanced at his old friend. The Major returned an answering twinkle, although for the life of him he could not see the joke. To have a great plate piled up with cold food that must be eaten before he could have another meal seemed but a sorry jest to that fastidious gentleman.

Billy looked down quickly. He had not meant to share his joke with a man who had

broken his toe trying to kick little colored boys back into slavery.

Aunt Minerva was right. He only pretended to eat the food and then pushed his plate away.

"I reckon my eyes was bigger'n my belly —I mean my tummy. You mus' 'scuse me, Aunt Minerva."

"Put the plate on the pantry shelf. Remember my rule!" Billy obeyed with ready docility.

"I reckon I kin make out to worry down a piece of pie," he said pensively.

Miss Minerva's first instinct was to deny him the pie to punish him for his heedless waste of good food, but a glance at her husband made her think better of it. It was evident that he did not at all approve of her strict ideas in regard to her nephew's bringing up.

He had looked askance at the heaped-up

plate of food that Billy must eat before he could have his supper, and she felt if she pushed the matter of no pie she would have two males to cope with instead of one.

"It is sho strange how yo' eatin's what you done et kinder shift an' make room for pie, when they won't budge for taters an' corn pone an' sich. Now I 'lowed they wa'n't a crack er room lef', an' I done 'sposed of that piece of pie, an'—an'—," with a little giggle, "I'clare fo' Gawd I b'lieve I kin worry down another piece as easy as shootin'!"

His aunt grimly served him to another wedge. He nibbled a little piece off of the corner and looked up sadly.

"I done miscalculated ag'in, Aunt Minerva. I'll jes' put this on the shelf 'long with the other. Maybe I kin run 'round the house an' jolt down some."

He was gone like a flash. Out to the woodhouse he flew.

"Bob White!"

"Bob White!" came from the attic room.

"Is you all right, Wilkes Booth Lincoln?" asked Billy as he climbed up the ladder to his friend's stronghold.

"Sho I is, but I's pow'ful lonesome up hyar."

"I got you some mo' eatin's. I'll fetch 'em out jes' as soon as Aunt Minerva settles hers'f."

"Ain't dat good news!"

"Are you hungry again?"

"I ain't ter say famishy, but I's 'mencin' ter growl a leetle. I done got so emptified a comin' dat it seems lak th' ain't no bottom ter my innards."

Billy dived into the pantry, thinking his aunt had settled herself to her sewing or devotional reading. Kerblim! he went right into the housekeeper's face. She was putting clean papers on her pantry shelves.

"Oh, it's jolted down!" his face was beaming with an ingratiating smile. "I've come back for everythin'-all-over-again. They's room now, Aunt Minerva, I reckon."

He seized the plate, putting the pie on top, and started to bolt out of the pantry as fast as he could go.

"William, you are behaving very strangely. You are not going to throw that food away?"

"Cross my heart an' hope I may die if these here vict— foods ain't a goin' down a red lane."

Miss Minerva had implicit faith in the honesty of her charge. Being perfectly honest herself, she was inclined to look for honesty in others. Her nephew was full of mischief, but she had found after many tests that he never lied. If he said that the plate of food was going down a red lane (his childish term for throat), then she was sure

it was going there. Billy had been careful not to say whose red lane.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln's red lane was ready for traffic, and his eyes bulged with delight when Billy appeared through the trapdoor with the plate of food. Jimmy arrived in a short while with more things purloined from his mother's pantry, and soon Lina and Frances came scurrying up the ladder, their arms laden with gifts for their adopted heathen.

"I brought him a 'broidered sofa cushion out of the guest chamber and some scented soap that my mother says smells too strong for anybody but company," said Lina. "Here's a portiere, too."

"And I brought him some of Father's striped pajamas. Now Wilkes Booth Lincoln, you must be sure and sleep in them. 'Tain't respectable not to sleep in pajamas," admonished Frances.

"I sho will, missy," and the little black

boy's eyes took on the expression of a faithful collie dog.

"And I brought you a liver-pad that Great-aunt Lavinia left in the top drawer

the last time she visitated us," continued Lina. "A liver pad is fine for keeping off aches and pains, so be sure you wear it."

"Yassum! Is it a kinder charm?"

"Maybe!"

"Thin I'll sho hang it on nixt my rabbit foot."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln had devoured the piled-up plate of food Billy had brought and had begun on the extras from Mrs. Garner's larder. One of the little girls then produced a stick of peppermint candy sucked into a fine point which made it just so much more desirable in the eyes of the little darkey.

"Golly Moses! but I is full!" he cried, hugging himself delightedly. "My hide is done drawed so tight over my meat I betcher you could crack a flea on my stumic."

His patrons and patronesses laughed with glee. It was great sport to be foreign missionaries.

"Is I gonter stay up in dis hyar lof' forever-an'-ever-amen?" he asked Billy. "I's kinder scairt er hants at night times."

"Shoo! Th'ain't no hants what will hurt

you," blustered Jimmy. "Sometimes they comes an' sucks yo' blood, but I reckon the blood-suckin' hants don't bother kids much."

"I'm more afraid of the Flabby-man," shuddered Frances. "Sometimes when I wake up at night I hear him flopping along the hall and it is all I can do to keep from screaming."

"Who dat Flabby-man? I ain't nebber hearn tell er him!" Wilkes Booth Lincoln's eyes were almost popping out of his head.

"Oh, he's a man without any bones—just all flippity-floppity and soft and squashy. He can't walk 'cause he's so flabby and I reckon he looks like dough. I never saw him. I don't know anybody who ever did see him, but lots of folks hears him. He just comes a dragging and bumping along and if he gets you—Ugh!—they's no telling what will happen. They do say he lives on folkses eyes—and if he catches you with your eyes

open he has power over you, so whenever you hear the Flabby-man coming you must scrooch your eyes up tight. If your eyes are shut he goes right off. Eyes are the onliest thing the Flabby-man wants. I reckon the reason he ain't ever et mine is because when I hear him coming I keep mine shut as tight as wax. Sometimes he comes and stands right over my bed, but I never stir and I keep my eyes shut and he goes a flopping off."

"Aw shucks! You all time thinkin' the Flabby-man is gonter git you," scornfully broke in Jimmy. "I betcher 'tain't nothin' but yo' mother or father or something a floppin' along in they ol' rundown bedroom slippers come to see if you is safe an' soun'."

"Will he git me, Missy Frances?" asked the poor little darkey.

"Not if you keep your eyes shut tight."

"I sho do wisht I could come out here an

sleep with you," sighed Billy, "or you could come in my room. If Aunt Minerva wa'n't so 'ticular an' if the Major only didn't want to smear yo' blood—"

"That's all right, Billy," quickly put in Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "I low I kin make out here. I'll put on my bigjammers, an' my libber pad an' I'll kiver up my haid an' nothin' cyarn't git me."

"Why don't you tie a string to your toe, Billy, and the other end to Wilkes Booth Lincoln's and if the Flabby-man or anything comes he can give a little jerk and you can go a running to his 'sistance?" suggested Frances, ever resourceful.

"'Sistance much! I betcher Billy'd run t'other way. I betcher Billy'd pull Wilkes Booth Lincoln's toe off a runnin'. Billy's all time runnin' away," Jimmy sniffed scornfully.

"Don' yo' say dat 'ere, white boy! Don'

yo' dar' say dat 'ere agin. Yo' got dis hyar nigger to whop if'n yo' say dat agin. Billy's got mo' spunk in his big toe dan yo' got in yo' whole foot, in both yo' foots, in yo' whole pusson." The little darkey's eyes were blazing. He doubled up his fists ready for a fight. "Billy don't nebber run away from nothin'," he declared emphatically. "If de Flabbergaster-man come ter git me he gonter hab Billy ter fight."

"Aw, you all time wanter fight little white boys when they ain't done nothin'!" cried Jimmy, stepping back perilously near the trapdoor where the stepladder came through, while the little darkey followed him up with threatening fists.

"Don't hurt him, Wilkes Booth Lincoln," begged Lina, giggling. "He's such a little boy."

"Little, yo' grandmother!"

'Th'ain't no cause for fightin', Wilkes

Booth Lincoln," said Billy loftily. "Jimmy don't mean nothin'."

"No, I don't mean nothin'. I'm all time jokin' that-a-way."

Peace was restored and next the string must be found long enough to reach from the loft to Billy's room. After much searching and many knots and splicings the deed was accomplished.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAJOR PERUSES AROUND

"JOSEPH, I am afraid William is in some mischief," said Mrs. Major. She could not help having a feeling of great contentment that she had someone to advise with her concerning her small nephew.

"My dear Minerva, I am sure there is something up, and now that he is in bed, with your permission, I am going to investigate. I am certain it is no serious mischief, but the little fellow has been in a state of great excitement all day." The Major did not add that he felt his little friend was harboring some grudge against him. Billy was right when he had told his aunt that he and the Major understood each other without having to talk.

Miss Minerva had reached the heel-turning point in the sock she was knitting, a point where conversation is not desirable, so she was glad that her devoted husband left her free for a moment to the counting of stitches. The Major, armed with his flashlight, went on his tour of investigation.

Billy was sleeping restlessly. His cheeks were flushed and his eyelids showed that grimy little fists had been dug in them, perhaps to wipe away tears. The Major leaned yearningly over the boy. How beautiful he was! His curls, so hated by their owner, made a halo around the sensitive little face; his lashes, long and dark, just tipped with gold, rested on his cheeks in a curve of beauty. His mouth, in spite of its childish loveliness, had a firm look and the Major was glad to see he slept with it tightly closed.

"Mouth breathers never make good fighters," muttered that military gentleman.

He turned his flashlight on Billy's room, diligently searching out a clue to the boy's trouble. One slender foot was stuck out from the light summer bed-covering. What was that? A string tied to his big toe! Billy's partner shook with silent laughter. The string was stretched across the room and disappeared through the open window. The amateur detective followed up his clue. His first thought was that it was a sort of telephonic connection between Billy and Jimmy, but when he found the line leading towards the woodhouse he was mystified.

"Um-hum, the window of the loft!" he muttered.

The ladder creaked under the Major's weight as he slowly drew himself up. The trapdoor was a tight fit for his bulky form. Had he not been soft, he, perhaps, could not have squeezed through the opening. The flashlight revealed Wilkes Booth Lincoln's

little form curled up in a tight ball on the old discarded couch. The portiere, furnished by Lina, had slipped off, disclosing the full glory of Mr. Black's striped pajamas. Great-aunt Lavinia's liver pad was worn over his face so that the dread Flabby-man could not glimpse his eyes. One trouser leg was rolled up, showing the terminal of the telegraph line was on his little black toe. He was convulsively stretching out and drawing up his leg. His S. O. S. for Billy. So violent was the pulling that the Major really feared for Billy's toe at the other end.

"Oh, Mr. Flabbergasty-man, please leave me be! I ain't nebber done no harm. I done runned away from de plantation, but nobody don't keer nothin' 'bout me but Billy an' Aunt Cindy, an' Aunt Cindy done say she a-comin' too. Please leabe me be, Mr. Flabbergasty-man! My eyes ain't fittin' fer to eat." He suddenly remembered that he had

given the signal for Billy and he knew his friend was on the way to his assistance. "Maybe yo'd better take my eyes, Mars

Flabbergasty-man. Don't take Billy's, please don't take Billy's!"

"What is the matter, my boy? I am not going to hurt you." The Major's quiet, kind voice was reassuring to the poor fright-

ened child. Surely the Flabbergasty-man wouldn't talk that way.

"Yo' sho you ain't de Flabbergasty-man."

"Sure!" laughed the Major.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln sat up on the couch and cautiously raised the liver pad.

"Yo' looks kinder saf' lak, but I reckons yo' is a gemman what is jes' perusin' aroun'."

There was a patter of bare feet below and a sudden scramble up the ladder.

"I'm a-comin'! I'm a-comin'! Jes' hol' out a minute, honey!" Billy's curly head appeared through the trapdoor. His astonishment at seeing the Major was only equalled by his terror.

"Oh, Maje, Maje, please don't smear Wilkes Booth Lincoln's blood! He ain't never done nothin' to you. Don't make him be a 'Gyptian slave. He'll go back to the plantation an' won't never come 'roun' here no mo'."

"Billy, what do you mean?" The man's tone was stern. "Who said I was going to smear anybody's blood?—and what have I to do with Egyptians?"

"Well, you done tol' me only this mornin' that you wisht you had a dozen slaves, an' when Wilkes Booth Lincoln runned away from Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearl-ine, which is his mammy, Jimmy Garner, he said you would cut him in two an' smear his blood 'cause you done broke yo' toe tryin' to kick niggers back into slavery."

The Major broke down and laughed, and both boys joined in, not that they knew what the joke was, but they were sure that no man who laughed like that could smear a little boy's blood. Wilkes Booth Lincoln had had one terrible moment when he realized that if this was not the Flabby-man it was no other than the dread, mysterious Major.

"He do soun' kinder flabbergastified whin

he draw hisse'f through de hole, don' he, Billy," whispered Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "Jes' like Missy Frances said—kinder squashy doughy. Oh, Billy, I is a happy pickaninny!"

The Major had a long and intimate talk with the two boys. He explained many things to them, but, best of all, Billy's confidence in him was restored. He was not a smearer of blood, nor had he broken his toe kicking slaves. He disabused their minds forever of a belief in the terrible Flabby-man, and also tactfully warned them against too wholesale an acceptance of statements made by their funny little neighbor, Jimmy Garner.

"Jimmy is all right, but take what he says with a grain of salt."

"He gonter git his haid bus' open if he gib me any mo' talk 'bout Billy runnin' t'other way whin I pull his toe. I knowed

Billy wouldn't leave me to get my eyes et up by de Flabbergasty-man, an' sho nuf whin I gib dat string a yank Billy come a runnin' ter me lak greased lightnin'. Didn't you, Billy?" Billy nodded.

"Were you scared, Billy?" asked the Major, looking at his partner admiringly.

"Well, I wa'n't to say easy in my min'; but I knowed Wilkes Booth Lincoln would a come runnin' to me, an' I mus' do the same by him. Is you mortified at me for bein' scairt?" Billy's eyes were sleepy and pensive.

"No, my son! To be scared and go anyhow is braver than not being scared at all. And now we must arrange a place for Wilkes Booth Lincoln to sleep for the rest of the night."

"I reckon I kin make out in de lof' again, sir, sence they ain't no Flabbergasty-man an' yo' ain't no blood smearer."

The Major smiled approval on the little colored boy who was determined to show his bravery too. With a steamer rug he contrived a pallet on the floor of Billy's room and told the comical child in the huge striped pajamas to sleep there. Seven was too young to sleep by itself out in the woodhouse, whether it be black or white, was the opinion of the kindly Major.

"What will Aunt Minerva say?" asked Billy.

"There is no telling, but I believe I can talk her around," declared the newly-wed.

CHAPTER V

SALUTE YOUR BRIDES

THE Major did talk her around, and when morning came that austere lady had an old suit of Billy's clothes ready for the little darkey. As she gave him his breakfast out on the back porch she smiled kindly on him. Miss Minerva usually smiled when she fed the hungry.

The kindly Sam Lamb and his wife Sukey consented to take Wilkes Booth Lincoln as a temporary lodger in their already overflowing cabin. Miss Minerva did not approve of the colored room-mate for Billy, and the Major deemed it wise to give in to her on that point.

"School will open in a few days and then all of the children will be occupied for more

than half the day," suggested the Major.

"You don't mean you are going to educate that little negro!" exclaimed Mrs. Major.

"Certainly! I should be ashamed to look my Maker in the face if I did not try to let him get as good an education as our nephew. I doubt his taking it, but he shall have his chance."

"Well, mark my word, it will be a waste of time—but you do not understand the negro as I do."

The Major smiled, but said nothing. At least he understood Miss Minerva better than she understood herself.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was taken into the sacred ring of the "Big Four," as Lina and Frances and Jimmy and Billy were dubbed by the neighbors. He served as a kind of body servant to the little group of white children. He always had to be what they

didn't want to be in the games, and he fetched and carried for them, docile and faithful and good-tempered to a degree almost pathetic. Billy would not let the others boss his little black friend too much, but reserved that privilege for his own aristocratic self.

Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline was written to by the Major and she readily consented to the adoption of her superfluous son.

"Blame ol' school's gotter c'mence tomorrow," sulked Jimmy; "let's do somethin'."

The five children were playing under the big beech tree in Miss Minerva's front yard. Since Billy came to live there, the grass that had vainly struggled for existence in the dense shade cast by the fine tree had succumbed entirely to his persistent little feet and those of his friends, and now the place

under and around the big double-seated green swing was bare and hard.

"Le's go listen to Miss Cecilia. She's a praxin on the orgin in church, an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never heard a orgin since he's born," suggested Billy.

The church was only about a block away, and one could hear the sweet strains of a hymn borne faintly on the September breeze.

"Bully! We kin creep in an' she won't never know we is a listenin'," announced Jimmy, jumping up and starting as was his wont. With Jimmy Garner, action and thought were almost simultaneous.

"I'm going to take my dolly," declared Frances. "Gladys Maud hasn't never been in church, and I have no idea of letting her grow up a Siamese heathen."

"I'm going to raise my daughter a 'piscolopian," said Lina. "My mother says 'pisco-

lopians is stylisher than methodists, and if Father wasn't so set she would switch over now, but my little Muriel shall never have it said that I did not raise her stylish."

"Well, I reckon it wouldn't hurt her to go just once to the methodist church," said Frances, readjusting the pillows and covers in the buggy containing her own precious baby.

"Maybe not! Anyhow I can't leave her here all alone," sighed the anxious mother.

"You girls all time talkin' sech nonsense. Come on! I'm a-goin' befo' Miss Cecilia stops for supper," and Jimmy led the procession to the Methodist Church, which was the most popular religious edifice in their town. It was not a large church, but was quite an old building which was constantly in need of repair, thereby keeping the Ladies' Aid Society very busy raising funds.

Time had softened somewhat the original

austerity of the edifice. Vines had almost covered it.

> They grew and grew to the church steeple top,
> Until they could grow no higher.

"That's where the bell lives, Wilkes Booth Lincoln," said Billy, pointing to the top of the square belfry. "Sometimes when the sextum rings real hard you kin see the bell a peepin' out. I wisht I could be up there when it rings. I betcher it would make you deef-an'-dumb with the noise."

"The sextum is still a kickin' like a steer 'bout that bell," put in Jimmy who always had the latest gossip gleaned from the conversation of grown-ups. "He says the rums of the ladder ain't strong enough fer his weight an' he ain't gonter ring the bell some Sunday mornin' an' then the Ladies' Aid will know what's what."

"My mother says there is no use in wasting money on a new ladder when they are

complentating a 'tirely new symstem of bells. They may 'cide on charms to be comtrolled by the organist and then a ladder will be superfluitous," said Lina, actually squirming to get out her big words.

"Listen to ol' Lina! She all time choking on big words. 'Tain't superfluitous, it's superficious."

"Shhh!" cautioned the peace-loving Billy. "We mustn't make no noise in the Tabernickle of the Mos' High."

The door was open and the children crept quietly into the dimly-lighted church. Miss Cecilia was playing with her whole heart in the hymn, and the little souls were awed into a kind of peaceful silence. They seated themselves behind the door, the girls clasping their dolls in their arms, whispering to them not to cry or make a noise in church. Wilkes Booth Lincoln was big-eyed with amazement over the cushioned seats and

stained glass windows. This church was very different from the one where he had been accustomed to see his friends and relatives get their annual spasms of religion.

"Dis hyar church don' 'semble Mount Sinai Tabernickle much, do it, Billy?"

The organ gave a sudden wheeze right in the midst of a chord of music and the cross voice of the sexton was heard, apparently issuing from the bowels of the earth, announcing that he did not intend to pump any more wind that day.

"All right!" called Miss Cecilia. "And thank you!"

"Ain't she sweet enough to eat?" was the verdict of all the children.

"I'll see to everything—good-bye!"

The children sat very still. Nobody had ever told them they must not go in the church while Miss Cecilia was practicing, but they had an instinctive feeling that it

was merely because the grown-ups had overlooked it. Miss Cecilia was sweetly humming a hymn tune as she tripped down from the organ loft. They heard a door softly close and then, silence!

"Now let's play something," said Lina.

"Let's play getting married," suggested Frances.

"Oh, shucks! Girls is all time wantin' to get married. I think funerals is lots mo' fun." This announcement from the cheerful Jimmy made them all laugh.

"Oh, let's get married and let Wilkes Booth Lincoln be the preacher," pleaded Lina.

"Yes, we can have a double wedding and our children can be the combregation."

"Whoever heard tell of chillens goin' to they own mothers' weddings? They could go to they funerals easy 'nough, but I betcher you didn't go to yo' mother's wedding,

Frances Black. You all time making out you been to yo' mother's wedding."

"One time I wint ter my maw's weddin'," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln, softly. He hardly ever spoke unless he was spoken to in these games with the white children, but now that he was becoming a little less shy he occasionally ventured a remark in his humble little drawl.

"One time my Maw got ma'id ter a sojer 'cause she had hopes he mought git shot an' thin she'd git some penshum, but it tu'ned out he had anudder wedded wife an' 'twa'n't no use."

"Was the soldier your father?" asked Lina.

"No'm! I ain't ter say got no reg'lar paw."

"Could you preach a wedding sermon?"

"Sho he kin!" declared Billy, overjoyed that his dear Wilkes Booth Lincoln was to

be foremost in some game. "He'n me is been a playin' preacher ever since we's born."

"Let's dress up," suggested Frances.

"Yes, I don't at all approve of traveling costertumes for brides. They should have long flowing veils and trails," said Lina, pulling the sheet from her doll buggy and beginning to drape it from her waist.

In a short while clever little fingers had converted doll rags into bridal finery. In the meantime the boys occupied themselves turning somersaults up and down the aisles. They seemed to have forgotten about its being the Tabernacle of the Most High.

"Who are you goin' to marry, Lina? I bid for Billy!"

"Now Frances Black, you know I wouldn't marry Jimmy Garner—not if he was the last man in cremation."

"An' I wouldn't marry you, Lina Hamil-

ton, not if yo's the first woman on God's-green-earth an' as rich as greases, besides," exclaimed Jimmy, standing on his head in front of the two brides. "You all time bossin' an' tryin' ter use sech big words. You think you're so smart with yo' petticoat a showin'!"

"That ain't my petticoat! That's my trail—and it is not politeful besides to stand on your head and look at ladies' laundgery."

"All right then, I'm always having to give up," pouted Frances. "I guess I'll take old Jimmy and you can have Billy. But, you've got to behave, Jimmy, if I marry you. That's what!"

"Be-have yo' grandmother! I'll marry Billy myself if you don't look out, an' then where will yo' sissies be?"

"Now we are all ready! I do wish we had some music to go up the aisle," and Lina spread out her cotton train and tossed her

head draped in the bit of mosquito net used to keep the flies off of Muriel.

"When my maw got ma'id we had the gran'es' percession," drawled the preacher. "Dey was tin gals what repersint de wise-an'-foolish virgums. Five er thim come marchin' up one side an' five on tother an' dey was a ca'in' lamps—an' dey wa'n't no ile in five er de lamps an' five er dem was full er ile. An' den dey all sung tergedder:

Dere were tin virgums whin de bridegroom come,
Dere were tin virgums whin he come;
Dere were tin virgums, dere were tin virgums,
Dere were tin virgums whin he come.

An' den de ones what is got plinty er ile, dey sings by dey-se'fs:

Five er dem were wise whin de bridegroom come,
Five er dem were wise whin he come;
Five er dem were wise, five er dem were wise,
Five er dem were wise whin he come.

An' den de ones what ain't got no ile, dey chime in wif:

Five er dem were foolish whin de bride-
groom come,
Five er dem were foolish whin he come;
Five er dem were foolish, five er dem were
foolish,
Five er dem were foolish whin he come.

Oh, gib us ob yo' ile whin de bridegroom
come,
Oh, gib us ob yo' ile whin he come;
Gib us ob yo' ile, gib us ob yo' ile,
Gib us ob yo' ile whin he come.

An' de wise make answer:

Go buy it at de sto' if you ain't got none,
Go buy it at de sto' 'fo' he come;
Go buy it at de sto', go buy it at de sto',
Go buy it at de sto' 'fo' he come.

Den dey all sings tergedder:

Oh, who will pay de preacher whin de bride-
groom come,
Oh, who will pay de preacher whin he come;

Who will pay de preacher, who will pay de preacher,
Who will pay de preacher whin he come?

Her maw will pay de preacher whin de bridegroom come,
Her maw will pay de preacher whin he come;
Her maw will pay de preacher, her maw will pay de preacher,
Her maw will pay de preacher whin he come.

An' thin my gran'mammy, what is called Sis Blue-gum Tempy, she ups an' walks up de church an' han's Brer Jackson two dollars in nickles an' dimes an' he counts it out, an' den he raises up he han' an' de wise an' foolish virgums steps aside an' de cirimunny begin."

"Oh my, I wish we could have virgums to our wedding," sighed Lina.

"Never mind, next time maybe we can," consoled Frances. "Now we must start. I

think I ought to go in front because I gave up marryin' Billy."

The grooms suddenly became meek, as is the way with grooms. The little darkey took his stand in the pulpit and the couples walked solemnly up the aisles, the dolls being placed in such a position in the pews that they could see their little mothers married.

"I bid to get married first!" clamored Jimmy.

"I's 'lowin' I'll 'form one cirimunny fer de passel er yo' alls an' whin I is through I reckon yo' alls kin sort yo' se'fs," ruled the preacher.

"An' now my brethren an' sistren, de time is come ter jine you alls tergedder in de bouns er holy matermunny. As so in de gyardin er Eden whin Adam an' Eve were a walkin' tergedder ter cool off, an' de notion hit 'em ter gib up dey evil ways, an'

callin' Cain, Abel an' Sef dey betook deys'fs ter de meetin' house an' was ma'id in de sight er de Lawd, so it is dis day wif you, my frien's."

The preacher's voice rose and fell with oratorical eloquence.

"Jimmy, do yo' an' Billy promus ter love, humor an' obey Miss Frances an' Miss Lina?"

"I do," spoke up Billy bravely without a moment's hesitation.

"Naw, I ain't a goin' ter love Frances an' I ain't a goin' ter obey nobody, man or beast. The man don't swear nothin' 'bout mindin' his wife."

"Oh, Jimmy, you are always breaking up games," said Lina crossly. "You can say you do and then fuss about it afterwards, the way grown-ups do."

"Do the way I done, Jimmy," whispered Billy, "say 'I do,' but keep yo' fingers crossed

all the time an' say right easy so nobody can hear you, 'Over the left shoulder.' That means you is jes' a foolin'."

"All right then—I do over the left shoulder, I'm jes' a foolin'," announced Jimmy sturdily.

The preacher feeling it was useless to argue with such a refractory groom went on with the ceremony.

"An' Miss Lina an' Miss Frances, will yo' alls promus ter keep an' support these hyar gints in sickness an' comfort 'til kingdom come?"

"I do!" came solemnly from the little girls, who were so busy arranging their impromptu trousseaux that they evidently did not regard the seriousness of the oath they were swearing.

"An' now," Wilkes Booth Lincoln raised his hand in final invocation, "if dey is ary nigger in dis hyar combregation what is got

anything ter say 'bout dis hyar 'rangement he better keep de peace. Who Gawd is jined tergedder let no man pull acinder. Now sort yo'se'fs!

S'lute yo' bride an' kiss her sweet,
An' den go home an' wash yo' feet."

CHAPTER VI

SIGNALS OF DISTRESS

"I THINK you are a splendid preacher, Wilkes Booth Lincoln; I don't see how you ever thought of all those things to say," said Lina, when the ceremony had been concluded.

"I jes' copycatted Brer Jackson. Dem's de words he used whin my maw ma'id de sojer man what had a wedded wife already."

"It's getting mighty dark," cried Frances. "I'm 'fraid my mama'll be worried to death about me. Let's hurry home!"

"Gee, I'm glad the Major is come to live to our house," was Billy's gleeful comment. "Aunt Minerva done change her min' 'bout puttin' me to bed all time when I slips up an' fergits to do right."

The girls gathered up their dolls, placed them back in the buggies, but kept on their wedding finery in their haste to get home.

"Locked!" exclaimed Billy, trying to open the heavy church door.

"Foolishness! You all time tryin' to make out little chilluns is locked up in churches. Lemme try! You ain't got no strength in yo' skinny arms." Jimmy pushed, pounded and kicked vigorously, but only bruised his shins. There was no budging the door.

"When Miss Cecilia said she'd 'ten' to everythin', I reckon she meant she would lock the do'," said Billy.

"Le's clam out de winders," suggested Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

But no matter how much they tugged they could not raise the heavy windows.

"I don't believe they ever open windows in church, anyhow," announced Lina. "My

father says that is why there is such an odor of sanctity here on Sunday."

"I reckon our folks is 'bout scared to death about us by now," whimpered Frances. "Do you think they will know enough to come hunt us here."

"I wisht they had tol' us not to come here, then they'd know we had come," sighed Jimmy. "Let's all scream together, this-a-way," showing them how.

"I can't scream unless I get hurt or scared or something," said Lina.

"Boo!" Jimmy jumped at her from behind at the same time pinching her on her plump little arm. "Now scream!"

Lina burst into a storm of weeping, but not the kind that can be heard from a distance.

"Pshaw! That kinder noise ain't nothin'. You all time tellin' me to hurt yo', an' then yo' haveter cry like a baby. Why don't yo'

holler this-a-way?" And Jimmy demonstrated with a war whoop that echoed through the building.

The church yard was large and the houses on both sides were vacant, so that no matter how loud the children called it did not carry far enough to reach the ears of their anxious parents and guardians.

Miss Minerva had begun to be uneasy about Billy.

"It is that negro boy who has led him off," she declared to the Major as he came in from the office with his accustomed, "Where's Billy?"

"The idea! Wilkes Booth Lincoln couldn't lead a flea off. Who led Billy off when he ran away to go on the excursion to Memphis?"

"That was Jimmy's fault," insisted Miss Minerva, who blamed Billy for things to his face, but never behind his back.

"Well, bless his heart for it, anyhow!" exclaimed the amorous Major. "I should never have won you if it had not been for the excursion to Memphis."

Miss Minerva smiled and blushed, but she could not conceal her anxiety over her nephew.

"I have told him to be in before dark and he is quite obedient as a rule. I think I'll telephone Mrs. Garner."

Mrs. Garner's, Mrs. Black's and Mrs. Hamilton's lines were kept busy for the next hour with inquiries for the missing children. Sam Lamb was sent for, Mrs. Maurice Richmond (Miss Cecilia) was called up and immediately ran over to Miss Minerva Major's to join in the search.

"They were in the swing the last time I saw them," wailed the poor auntie, "but that was hours ago. Something must have happened."

"Nothing could have happened to all five of them," encouraged the Major.

"They might be drowned."

"Hardly all five of them," said the Major, putting up a brave front.

"I was reading to Billy yesterday," whimpered Miss Minerva, "out of that book you got him:

> Five children sliding on the ice,
> All on a summer's day—
> As it fell out they all fell in,
> The rest they ran away.

There were five of them and they all fell in."

Miss Minerva, quoting Mother Goose as though it were scripture, was too much for the Major's sense of humor and he gave a chuckle.

"Maybe they have tried to go back to the plantation," suggested his wife. "Billy has been asking me to let him go back some day."

"Well, they can't get very far without our catching them. But before I start on the road to the plantation I'll comb the town for them."

"Oh, Joseph, you are a good man!" The unusual praise from his reticent Minerva sent a glow to the heart of that fine gentleman, who went sturdily off in search of the lost children, without his supper.

The harvest moon was making the September night almost as light as day, but the distracted parents and guardians were rushing around with lanterns and flashlights. By the time the search was in full swing the children had grown tired of screaming and were busy devising means of escape from the locked church.

* * * * * * *

"We might tunnel under the walls," suggested Lina, who had forgiven Jimmy for pinching her and stopped crying.

"What we gonter dig with? Yo' all time wantin' folks to dig 'thout nothin' to dig with."

"We could dig with the backs of hymn books an'—an'—the collection plate."

"I wonder what is urums an' thurums, what Aunt Minerva read me was in the Jewy temples. Do you reckon you could dig with them?"

"I wisht this was a Jew church, 'cause Miss Cecilia done 'splained to me how you kin keep a blowin' on horns 'til all the walls of Jew churches falls in," said Jimmy.

"Well, I'm glad th'ain't no horns here, 'cause I'd ruther to be in a church than under one," laughed Billy.

The children, buoyed up by numbers, were still able to look upon their adventure gaily.

"Maje is sho to come fin' us," was Billy's unfailing response in answer to any doleful remarks from the others.

"I's gittin' pow'ful hongry," was finally whispered by the colored contingent. "Looks lak I ain't been able to touch bottom somehow sence I got so empty a-comin' ter live with Billy."

"There's show bread in the Jew churches, too," said Frances. "I'm like Jimmy, I think it's a pity we are not Jews."

"Yes, an' you eat show bread an' yo' father'll fall off'n his stool at his office like ol' Lazarus done when Hofni an' Finishus ate things in the church that they had no business a-doin'. That's what Miss Cecilia 'splained to me," said Jimmy.

"Well, th'ain't nothin' in this here Methodist Church to eat. I tell you what le's do," and Billy's eyes were shining in the moonlight that poured through the stained glass windows. "Le's climb up the ladder an' ring the bell."

"Now you're talkin'!" cried Jimmy. "I

been a thinkin' all the time that would be the bes' plan, but you all the time not listenin' to me."

"You haven't at all, Jimmy Garner," snapped his bride of an hour.

"How you know what I been a thinkin'? Jes' because I married yo' ain't no sign yo' kin see in my thinker."

"You girls wait down here an' us boys will clam up an' do the ringin'," suggested Billy quickly, to avert the connubial row that seemed imminent.

"You needn't think I'm going to stay down in this spooky old church with nobody but Frances," squealed Lina.

"I am going where my dear husband goes," teased Frances.

"Gee, I wisht I hadn't never got married! Well, if you must come—come!"

The entrance to the belfry was under the organ loft. The children had often seen the

cross old sexton open the door and go in, and soon after the bell would begin to ring. It was as dark as pitch in the closet-like entrance. They caught hold of hands and with slow steps entered.

"I's sho glad th'ain't no Flabby-man," whispered Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

"Thain't never nothin' in church to hurt folks," Billy assured his little black friend. "God's all the time in church an' he looks after folks what is right under his nose."

"God's all the time everywhere and they get hurt some places," Frances sceptically remarked.

"That's what preachers call hominy present," said Lina.

"But he's mo' in the church than anywhere else, 'cause ain't it his home—an' don't folks stay in they homes mo'n anywhere else," insisted Billy.

"Well, I eats an' sleeps in mine an' that's

jes' about all," giggled Jimmy. "Billy Hill, I betcher you's afraid to go up the ladder first."

"I betcher I ain't!"

"Jimmy's afraid himself, and that's the reason he's betting you," spoke up his all-knowing spouse.

"I wanter go first. Me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln 'll go first. We'll go together. We been a goin' together all over ever since we's born."

"Yessir! I's a goin' whar Billy goes."

They felt in the dark for the ladder that led into the loft where they knew the bell rope hung.

"Here it is," cried Billy. "It's real high up. Us boys kin skin up, Jimmy, but I reckon you'll have to boost Lina an' Frances."

"Girls is all time gotter git boosted—but I'll do it," in a martyred tone.

Billy swung lightly up and the little colored boy followed.

"'Tain't so dark up here," called Billy reassuringly to the children below. "The moon's a shinin' through the cracks."

"Don't you ring 'til I git up there," commanded Jimmy.

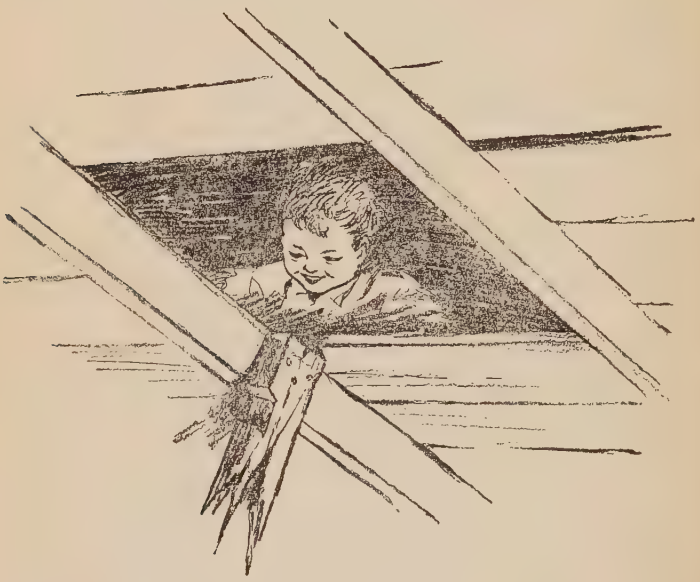
Jimmy presented a fat back to the little girls, who, with much squealing and giggling, climbed up on him and reached the lowest rung of the ladder, which creaked ominously as they clambered up.

"Come on, Jimmy!" they called to the booster.

"I'm a-comin'! You done stepped on me so hard it mashed me down so I can't clam good." He managed, however, with much puffing and panting to get his fat leg over the first rung and then he went rapidly up. Just as his bushy black hair appeared through the trapdoor, the rotten ladder gave

way with a great crash and Jimmy was left hanging to the landing.

"Catch me! Catch me!" he screamed, clinging to the sill for dear life.



The moonlight was flooding the little square room of the belfry, finding its way through the slatted windows—windows the children had seen from the outside many

times, but had never dreamed of viewing from within. Jimmy's agonized countenance was well lighted and he looked so comical that the girls could not help laughing.

"Stop that laughing! Ding bust it!" he cried. "Can't you see I'm a slippin'?" Billy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln caught hold of his hands and Lina and Frances grabbed Billy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln by the waist. Squirming and twisting, Jimmy was finally pulled to safety from the yawning abyss.

"You all time thinkin' 'bout clamming up ladders an' ringin' bells, Billy," were his first words when he realized that his feet were no longer dangling over nothing.

"How about your own wonderful thinker that your wedded wife can't look in?" teased the unfeeling one.

"Oh, stop fussing and let's ring the bell,"

suggested Lina. "This reminds me of the beautiful poem called 'Curfew must not ring to-night.' I learned it by heart when my cousin Elsie used to recite it."

"Well, curfew is gonter ring this night," said Jimmy, grabbing hold of the rope, which hung in a straight line from the mysterious heights above and lay coiled like a great snake on the dusty moonlit floor. "Curfew is gonter ring an' curfew ain't gonter be no name for it!"

"I reckon when the folks in this town hears this bell a ringin' they's gonter git up to go to the fire," sniggered Billy.

"Maybe they'll think it is prayer meetin' night," suggested Frances.

"I wisht they would an' come an' open up this tabernickle. Come on an' ring," cried Billy. "Gee, but this rope is heavy!"

Ringing a bell was not near such an easy matter as the children had imagined. Their

respect for the cross old sexton increased when they realized it took the combined strength of all five of them to get a faint sound from the great bell.

"Looks lak we gotter retch up higher an' thin swing onter it an' thin let go all ter onct," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

This plan worked, after some practice, and suddenly a great clanging of the Methodist Church bell startled the people of the town. The children were delighted with their prowess, and again and again they caught hold of the rope, and with a long pull and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, and with a sudden let-go, they gave the old bell such a ringing as it had never experienced before.

Miss Minerva heard it and took it for some terrible mishap that must have befallen the children. Mrs. Garner, Mrs. Black, and Mrs. Hamilton had the same

feeling. The Major, who with the fathers was organizing a search party, at the drug store, heard it and made for the church as fast as his short, fat legs could carry him. The half-organized party of citizens followed him. Sam Lamb heard it and also started for the meeting house. The cross old sexton heard it and got crosser than ever, but got down his keys and hastened to see who was desecrating the House of the Lord at that unseemly hour of the night, and with such uneven, horrid jangling of the bell.

The crowd met at the church door.

"Did you ring the bell, Thomas?" the Major demanded of the sexton.

"No; and why should I be ringing the bell of a Chuesday?"

"Our children are lost and we thought maybe—"

"No, but I'll see who did ring it, and I

bet you I'll lam 'em for it. I'll get you gentlemen to surround the church so they can not escape."

"Was anybody in the church to-day?" asked Mr. Garner, who was in a state of great excitement over the disappearance of his naughty but much beloved offspring.

"Miss Cecilia was practicing on the organ."

"Well, open the door, old man, and let us in," commanded Mr. Black.

Again the bell clanged forth its brazen appeal.

"Listen to that! The devils!" muttered the old sexton. He unlocked the great door and then led the way to the entrance of the belfry.

Silently the search party followed the old man. Mr. Black stumbled over something. It was a doll baby buggy.

"Why, it's Gladys Maud!" exclaimed

that gentleman as he turned on his flashlight. He took the rag baby in his arms and cuddled it close, as though it had been a really and truly grandchild.

"Billy! Billy!" shouted the Major, in spite of the sexton's admonitions to be silent so he could catch the miscreants red-handed. "Billy! are you up there?"

As the reverberations of the bell ceased he called again:

"Billy! Billy!"

"Hi, Maje!" and Billy poked his curly head over the edge of the opening through which the broken ladder hung. "Hi, Maje! I knowed you would come."

Members of the search party declared that that intrepid fighter of Yankees and Indians actually sobbed when he heard those words from his beloved boy.

"I guess now them Ladies' Aids will give me some new steps," growled the sexton.

The explanations which ensued were satisfactory to the grown-ups, who were only too glad to have the children safe. A ladder was brought and the prisoners clambered down into the waiting arms of their deliverers.

CHAPTER VII

BILLY GREEN HILL

THE children fondly hoped that after getting lost and being up so late, they would be excused from school the next day, but the grown-ups were determined that their education should begin on the day set aside for it, and begin it did, Wilkes Booth Lincoln's as well.

The little colored boy was to enter school with Sam Lamb's children, who had promised to look out for the stranger. The Major had taken upon himself the task of starting Billy, much to that youngster's delight. He had been so afraid Aunt Minerva would consider it her duty to do the starting, and he was sure she would ask the teacher to let him sit with the girls or some such sissy

thing. As it was, she mortified him enough by insisting that he should carry his lunch in a fancy straw basket with ribbons run through it. It was a trifle someone had given her for Christmas, and the good lady had been saving it religiously for this very purpose.

"Maje, would you like to carry yo' dinner in a fool little baxit like that?"

"Ahem! It is a very pretty basket."

"So's the hat Aunt Minerva got on her honeybeemoon pretty, but I betcher you wouldn't like to wear it nowhere. I think tin buckets is nice to carry dinners in like men carry. Do you reckon Jimmy will bring his dinner in sech a fancy baxit?"

Billy and the Major were on their way to school, the Major trying not to show how proud he was of having a son of his own to start on the broad road to learning. He looked fondly down on his little charge.

The man understood exactly how Billy felt about the beribboned basket, but he did not know just what to do about it. His wife must not have her feelings hurt, but neither must Billy be mortified, not on the very first day at least.

"Come in here, son!" They were passing a small shop where almost anything could be bought, from all-day-suckers to floor mops. A neat lunch box was purchased and Billy's dinner quickly transferred from the fancy basket. The place was kept by a nice old man named Mr. Griggs, who was taken into the Major's and Billy's confidence. He promised to keep the fancy basket until after school, and Billy could run in and get it, leaving his new box until called for.

"We can do this every day until I can think up some other plan of campaign," laughed the Major as he turned to Mr.

Griggs. "It won't trouble you too much?"

"Bless you, no! I'll get up early and stay up late for the pleasure of fooling the ladies," chuckled the old fellow. Mr. Griggs had a face like a rosy, winter apple and very white hair that made Billy think the snow must have fallen on the apple before it could be picked. His shoulders were broad, his legs short and a little bowed. It was whispered that he had been a circus actor, but nobody knew much about the cheery old man, who had come to their town, opened up the little shop, where he did a thriving penny business, and, as far as was known, lived a quiet, simple life.

Life was much happier for Billy, now that he had disposed of the silly little basket. He marched into school proudly, holding the Major's hand when he saw other children clinging to their fathers' and mothers'. Jimmy was there before him, already

giving himself the superior air of knowing the ropes better than Billy, because his arrival happened to antedate Billy's by perhaps three minutes.

"I 'lowed to set on the front seat, but up there teacher is all time seein' what you do, so now I'm a goin' to set on the backmost desk. Where are you gonter set?"

"I don't know 'zactly, but I reckon I'm gonter set wherever you sets."

"You all time gotter copycat me. Where you git yo' lunch box? I'm gonter git me one."

Billy smiled, but intimate acquaintance with Jimmy made him feel it was wiser not to call him copycat, too.

There was much confusion in the primer class. Some of the children clung to their mothers and wept, while others, having come to school to have fun, were having it. There were no tears shed by the Big Four,

and they looked with scorn on their timid schoolmates who felt called upon to weep on this first day of school.

"We all time gotter go to school with a passel of cry babies. Anything I hate it's cry babies," sniffed Jimmy.

Miss Larrimore rapped sharply on her desk. The mothers and fathers, ranged against the wall, sat up straight, as though they were back in school, just beginning to learn to read. There was something about Miss Larrimore that made people sit up straight if they were seated, and walk chalk if they were standing. In the first place, she had a red head, not the kind of red hair that it is stylish to have and that young ladies try to have, but red, red hair that looked hot and crinkly, as though her brain were on fire and her hair had burst forth in flames. Her face was very freckled, but it wasn't an ugly face—at least Billy

did not think it was ugly. There was something about her face that he liked, he didn't know exactly what. It could hardly be her eyes, which were unmistakably green, or her

mouth, that shut together with such a decided click. Certainly her nose wasn't very pretty, with a big mole on one side. Her ears were made for hearing, and stood out from her head so that not the smallest

whisper could escape them. Her eyes were made for seeing, so no lashes were wasted on them.

"Ain't she a beaut, not?" whispered Jimmy.

"She's—she's—clean lookin'," answered Billy.

That was it. Miss Larrimore was so clean looking that one had to admire her.

"I am going to write down your names now," and Miss Larrimore rapped again. Some of the waiting mothers started forward, eager to help and give in the names of their own particular darlings.

"Never mind," sternly; "all of these children can talk, I presume." The mothers sat down again, looking a little crestfallen.

There were forty children gathered there, and each one had to go to the desk when Miss Larrimore pointed her pencil and give in his or her name. Some of the little girls

cried rather than speak, and some of the boys pouted and kicked the rostrum, but each one was forced by the relentless teacher to speak up.

Lina and Frances switched up and gave their names without a tremor. The teacher looked at them keenly. The reputation of the Big Four had preceded them to the primer class. Whenever several natural children play together constantly they get the name of being naughty. The mischief of all the group is laid at the door of each one. For instance, in this case Lina and Frances were blamed not only for their own faults, but for the faults of Billy and Jimmy, while those youths not only had to shoulder their own shortcomings, which were burden enough, but also had to answer for the sins of the two little girls.

After them the pencil pointed to James Garner, Jr.

"What is your name?" He had stumped up to the platform, making as much noise as he could with his new school shoes. His eye had a mischievous gleam and his saucy mouth simply would not behave, but spread itself in a broad grin.

"My name is Jimmy an' I take all you gimmy!"

"All right, I'll give you a seat in front, where you can be close to me." The other thirty-nine giggled delightedly.

Jimmy could not stand being laughed at. It was a hard thing for him to have to stand up in front of the school and give his full name, James Lafayette Garner, Junior, while all the children smiled out loud. Even his mother was smiling, which was a bitter pill for Jimmy. He took his seat, which, sad to tell, was right under the nose of Miss Larrimore.

Next, the recording pencil pointed to

Billy. He arose and walked jauntily to the front. He passed the Major on the way and looked up into his face and winked. That made him feel a little more at his ease, because the Major winked back.

"What is your name?" The green eyes were sharp and the thin-lipped mouth shut with a click that reminded Billy of the Major's match safe. Billy's blue eyes looked squarely into the green ones.

"Billy, Billy Hill's my name."

"Billy is no name. What is your full name?"

"Billy Green Hill!"

"What is your name?"

"Billy Green Hill!"

"I asked you: What is your name? I want your real name. Billy is not a real name."

The waiting mothers and fathers were smiling, and even Miss Larrimore had a

twinkle in her green eyes as Billy, with flushed face, manfully stood his ground.

"It is my name," he insisted. "Nobody but Aunt Minerva ever has called me anything but Billy since me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln's born. Ain't Billy my name, Maje?" The boy turned and addressed his old partner.

"His name is Billy, Miss Larrimore," said the Major, looking quite as determined as that lady herself; so Billy was written down in the roll book as Billy Green Hill.

CHAPTER VIII

A RIGHT SWEET CUSS

BILLY was enlarging his acquaintance. He was a friendly soul and inclined to like everybody, and everybody, in consequence, was inclined to like him. His latest chum was a big boy named Tom Collins; at least Billy thought he was a big boy. He was all of nine years, and his chief distinction was that this was his second year in the primer class. Not that Tom was stupid—far from it. He was particularly clever in evading book learning and had come through one year of Miss Larrimore's system without knowing how to read, which was indeed a remarkable achievement. Miss Larrimore could teach anybody how to read, and her classes had the repu-

tation of coming through with flying colors.

Miss Larrimore was not certain whether Tom couldn't or wouldn't. His second year in school was to solve the problem.

There were many things Tom did know that the other children in his class did not know. He knew where the field larks built their nests, and when the swallows were likely to go farther south. He knew what the big beetles were doing when they dug their holes to bury themselves. He knew how the katydids produced their funny scrapy noise, and how to make tree frogs be quiet. He also knew what it was to have a drink-sodden father come home and mistake his son for a punching bag. There was one thing Tom knew that the smaller boys envied him greatly: he knew how to swear! It seemed no more trouble to him than breathing. The words came rolling out as naturally as though he were a coal cart

driver or a Mississippi River steamboat roustabout.

Tom's mother was dead and he lived with his father on the edge of town in a little old tumbledown house with a big yard. A colored woman known as "Fat Molly" sometimes cooked for them and sometimes didn't, so poor Tom had his fat days and his lean days. On his lean days he stole the other children's lunch, and on his fat days he very generously handed his out to anyone who wanted it.

Mr. Collins had no visible means of support. He came from Connecticut, and it was whispered that he lived on a pension derived from having fought in just what war nobody was quite certain. He seemed too young to have been in the Civil war, but then he may have preserved an eternal youth in the alcohol in which he so freely soaked himself.

"I don't see why you all time wanter take up with Yankees, Billy Hill," stormed Jimmy. Jimmy was very jealous of Billy's new friend. "I betcher the Major will raise Cain when he finds a Yankee in Miss Minerva's yard."

"I done asked Maje if he'll fight Yankees still," said Billy, "and he done answered that he laid off his antimosity with his unifawm. Them was his very words."

Tom stood by with a tolerant expression on his dirty face while he was under discussion. He did not seem to care in the least what Jimmy thought of him. Miss Minerva's yard was a good stopping place on his way from school, and this was one of the days that Fat Molly was not cooking for them, so there was no reason to hurry home.

Jimmy's jealousy was forgotten when a new and fascinating game of making log houses out of sticks plastered in place with

mud was started. Tom knew how to whittle with a Barlow knife, and could cut sticks the same length without taking nicks out of his fingers. He could make the dearest little water wheels, too; water wheels that would really turn, and he promised Billy and Jimmy that if they came out to his house, where there was a spring and a little stream, he would show them how to set the wheels on pronged sticks and let the water turn them.

"Who learnt you how to make 'em?" asked Billy.

"I guess I must have l'arned myself."

"I reckon yo' father is right proud of all them things you kin do."

Tom looked at his new friend quizzically.

"I calculate the old man hain't never worrited his head much about what I can do." Tom said "calculate" and "guess" where the little southern boys said "reckon."

"He's so drunk most of the time he can't see the road ahead of him," and Tom ripped out an ear-splitting oath.

Billy and Jimmy were big-eyed over the great oath. Wilkes Booth Lincoln joined the boys just then, and he, too, looked shocked.

"Aunt Cindy done tol' Billy an' me we mustn't say nothin' stronger dan darn 'til we puts on long pants," said the little darkey. "She says damns is meant for gemmen an' not for boys."

"There's heaps of ways of cussin' without sayin' damn," explained the adept.

"Oh, is they?" and the three younger boys gathered close around him.

"Now, if you let the old folks hear you, I bet you they'll burn you up," Tom admonished after he had given full instructions in various combinations of oaths.

"You ain't nothin' to what Uncle Jimmy-

jawed Jupiter can do, 'cept'n' he all time puts in lots er damns. I reckon 'tain't no sin to cuss 'thout sayin' damn," said Billy. "What yer reckon?"

"I'm gonter learn all the cussin' I kin," declared Jimmy, "an' when I grow up I kin put in all the damns I want an' have the other cusses all ready for them. My father says when folks get to wearin' collar buttons that swearin' is a needcessity."

"Maje don't never swear none, but they is times when I think somethin' is sho gonter pop out, an' if I looks up I see Maje mighty red in the face, with his jaws kinder puffed out like he been blowing up a balloon. I betcher if you stick a pin in Maje, right out er that pinhole a big cuss word would oozle. He keeps his mouth shet so tight it couldn't git out that-a-way. Aunt Minerva is so 'ligious I reckon if Maje should rip out with even darn she'd make

him tote his furnisher back to the hotel an' stop livin' to our house."

"She better not be so stric' with her little ole man," said Jimmy. "Miss Minerva's all time losin' her husbands, not lettin' 'em cuss or nothin'."

Tom Collins's seed had fallen on fertile soil. The delightful pastime of cursing without saying damn proved very fascinating to Billy and Jimmy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln. They taxed their ingenuity to the utmost to compose new and wonderful oaths, all within the law since the wicked word was left out.

"Le's don't tell Lina an' Frances, 'cause they're such tell-tale-tits. They're all time tellin' little boys' mothers an' aunts when they cusses 'thout usin' damn," said Jimmy. So Lina and Frances were left out, and those young ladies instinctively felt that something was going on in which they, as mere

females, were not allowed to participate, and their curiosity was aroused.

Sometimes the little boys would whisper together and then roll on the ground with glee. Then the little girls would toss their heads and switch their short skirts and go home, hatred and bitterness in their hearts that they belonged to the feminine sex.

One day they were all of them in the big swing playing steamboat. Billy, who had skinned his knee on a rusty nail and had a bandage on in consequence, was allowed the privilege of being first mate, a part that for action and charm far surpassed that of captain. Wilkes Booth Lincoln was appropriately cast as roustabout. Jimmy was pilot, with one of the doll buggies turned on its side to furnish the pilot wheel. Lina and Frances were high-toned passengers, with many children and numerous wants.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln, grinning mightily,

was patiently loading and unloading, pretending to be about twenty deck-hands at once. The first mate stood up on the seat and gave his orders with all the strength of his lungs. Suddenly, when the little darkey sat down to rest and cool off a moment, Billy, acting the part too realistically, came ripping out the finest, longest, and most expressive of all of his damnless oaths.

"Oh, William Green Hill! I am 'shamed of you!" cried Lina.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," screamed Frances. "I am gonter take my doll rags an' go straight home."

"Yes, and I intend to tell Miss Minerva Major that you have insulted us right here in your yard. I know now what you and Jimmy have been acting up so about lately. I reckon my mother will refuse to let me play with such bad boys."

"You don't like us an' you know what

you kin do with us," said Jimmy, sticking out his tongue so far that he seemed in danger of not being able to draw it back. "Lump us! Lump us! If you don't like us, lump us!"

Billy devoutly hoped that Lina was not in earnest about telling his aunt, but he was too proud to beg her to reconsider. His relief was great, however, when the two little girls, trundling their baby carriages, switched off home, indignation expressed in every line of their erect backs.

"Ain't girls the limit?" sneered Jimmy. "All time gotter get huffy! Huccum yo' all time cuttin' loose an' swearin' befo' 'em, Billy? You know th'ain't got the sense that God give a crabapple."

"I know," was Billy's dejected rejoinder. "But when I gits to playin' first mate it looks like swearin' comes so natchel."

The sound of the telephone bell was

plainly audible out under the beech tree. A few moments passed—moments of oppressiveness for Billy—and then Aunt Minerva's voice was heard calling.

"William Green Hill! Come here!" Her voice sounded angry and distressed.

"I done tol' you!" said Jimmy.

"I done tol' myself," was all Billy could find words to say.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln started to go in with his captain. If Miss Minerva was going to burn up Billy, there would have to be two in the fire.

"Aunt Minerva ain't called you. I reckon you'd better wait," ruled Billy, miserably.

"William, what is this I hear?" Aunt Minerva sounded very stern. She looked at Billy over her spectacles, which was something he hated.

"Would you min' takin' off them specles all the way, Aunt Minerva? When you

peeps over the tops of 'em it kinder 'stracts me."

"Never mind my spectacles." But she removed her reading glasses from her Roman nose. It did not improve matters much.

"What is this I hear, William?"

"I don't know, Aunt Minerva. I wisht you had a little window in yo' haid so I could peep in an' see. Wouldn't it be nice, Aunt Minerva, if folks jes' could peep in other folkses' haids, an' then we wouldn't have to talk none 'less we felt like it? Sometimes looks like Maje kin see in my thinker an' I kin see in his, but I ain't never been able to make out what women folks is studyin' 'bout. I reckon it's 'cause they haids is thicker—"

"William," fixing a severe look upon him, "you are talking nonsense just to keep me from coming to the point."

CLIM DONAHEY.

"Why, Aunt Minerva, looks like you kin see in my thinker same as Maje!"

"What is this Lina Hamilton has reported to her mother about your using bad words? Mrs. Hamilton felt it her duty to telephone me, and I am sure she was quite right to do it. What is it, William?"

"I'm sure I don't know jes' what Lina did 'port. Lina don't know how to play true. I was jes' a playin' true. You see, Aunt Minerva, we was a playing steamboat, an' I was the mate an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln was twenty roustabouts, an'—an' —I never yet seed a first mate what didn't swear, an' I got to playin' so hard I done plum forgot I wa'n't a sho nuf mate an' befo' I knowed what, I jes' busted out."

"Shocking! And to think how I have tried to bring you up a Christian gentleman!"

"Aunt Minerva, I ain't said anything so

very bad. Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never cussed with damn in it since we's born, 'cause we ain't put on long pants yet. We done got a way of cussin' what ain't bad. Wilkes Booth Lincoln an' Jimmy they remembers jes' to cuss out to the woodhouse, but I am all time fergittin' an' rippin' out 'fo' folks."

"What are these bad words you say, William?" Aunt Minerva sounded so sad that Billy's heart bled for her.

"Why, Aunt Minerva, I wouldn't sile yo' yers with no sich talk."

"But you said them before your little playmates, Lina and Frances?"

"Yessum; but then I was a first mate, an' that is diffunt. If you could make out to play you was a roustabout an' I was tryin' to make you wuck I might manage to bus' out ag'in."

"Nonsense, William! I am tired of this

foolishness. Tell me this minute, what are the words you used?"

At that moment the Major came back from his office, but, like many fat persons, he had a very light tread, and neither Billy nor his Aunt knew that he was at the door. The man of the house stopped for a moment, feeling instinctively that his little partner was under fire. He could not bear to witness the punishment that he felt his wife's tone presaged.

"Now, Aunt Minerva, I ain't anxious to tell you what I done called Wilkes Booth Lincoln, all in play, 'cause I was tryin' to act true. But if you mus' know, you mus'." Billy stood up very straight in front of his aunt, and his childish face looked worn and sad.

"This is a swear what I made up all to myself, but it ain't got a single damn in it, an' I thought it might do s'long as I am in

knickers. I jes' said—I—well—I said: Blue bellied, red bellied, pink bellied, green bellied, yellow bellied, gol darned son of a gun. Don't yo' think that's a right—a right—sweet cuss, Aunt Minerva? I done it all by myself."

Miss Minerva was completely overcome. Her shocked countenance was more than Billy could bear. As for the Major, he beat a hasty retreat out of sight, but not out of ear-shot. He sank in one of his soft leather chairs and there he gave himself up to a fit of silent, shaking, satisfying laughter.

"Is you 'shamed to death of me, Aunt Minerva?"

"Oh, my dear William, I hardly know what to say to you. I think it is best for us to pray to the Lord to help us. He only can make you see the error of your ways."

If there was one thing Billy dreaded it was those moments when Aunt Minerva thought

it best to explain to her Maker her troubles and perplexities. She was lengthy and complicated in her explanations, and Billy felt that life was too short to give up so much time to vain repetitions.

"Aunt Minerva, don't you reckon I might git better if you made me go to bed for, say—'bout a half hour?"

"No, William, I feel that this is such a serious matter we must do as the good hymn says and 'Take it to the Lord in prayer.' Kneel down, my child, and I will kneel by you."

"Aunt Minerva, ain't you forgetted 'bout my so' knee? I done hurted it right in the kneelin'-down place."

"Kneel on one knee, then!"

"I done skunt the other one too a leetle bit while we was a playin' steamboat."

"Then stand up!" Aunt Minerva's tone was very sharp for one who was approach-

ing the Mercy Seat. "Stand up and pray out loud."

This was different. So he was to do the praying himself, and not Aunt Minerva.

Billy bowed his head reverently, and with his eyes tightly closed, fervently prayed:

"O God, please don't let me shock Aunt Minerva no mo'. Please don't let me forget 'nother time an' do my cussin' 'fo' folks, 'specially women folks an' little gals what ain't got no' mo' sense than you give a crabapple. Don't let me call Wilkes Booth Lincoln a blue bellied, red bellied, pink bellied, green bellied, yellow bellied, gol darned son of a gun no mo'. 'Co'se, dear Lord, that ain't to say proper cussin' 'thout no damn in it, but it wa' the bes' I could do. An' Lord," and here Billy's voice took on an oratorical ring; he was beginning to realize the

pleasure his aunt had in exhorting, "make all of us in this household better folks. Make us to bear with one another—make us to have eyes to see in the thinkers of others, so, O Lord, we won't bring sorrow down on any one of us. Make Maje to stop a shakin' his pipe out on the hearth, jes' makin' trouble fer Aunt Minerva. Make Aunt Minerva sen' fer Aunt Cindy so she kin git time in the mornin' to fluff up her hair so she won't look so like a skint rabbit. Make Aunt Cindy come on off'n the plantation an' be the cook for this sinful fambly. Make po' Tom Collins's father stop a gittin' drunk an' beatin' up Tom. Tom ain't never done no harm to nobody, an', O Lord, please don't take out no spite on him. An' now, O God, we thanketh thee for our few blessin's. We thanketh thee for Maje, who is a refuge in the time er storm. We will thanketh thee for the billy-goat when it

comes. We thanketh thee for Wilkes Booth Lincoln, who is ever present in the hour er need an' famine. We thanketh thee for Aunt Minerva, who hath done what she could, an' we will thanketh thee for Aunt Cindy whenever she comes to our house to be the cook.

Amen! Brother Ben!
Somebody stole my mammy's hen!"

CHAPTER IX

MR. CARROLL OF BALTIMORE ROW

GOING to school was not so very bad after all. The wonderful art of reading was gradually being unfolded to the children. Miss Larrimore's teaching was according to the most advanced methods, but Aunt Minerva had strong doubts as to its thoroughness. It seemed to her to be very loose for children to be taught to write long words before they even knew how to say the alphabet and to read "Mother Hubbard had a dog," before they knew how to spell dog. She had to admit, however, that Billy was progressing rapidly. His speech was improving, too. Miss Larrimore was very strict in regard to her pupils' English and abhorred the word "ain't." There was

no room for double negatives in that primer class. One of them must go.

"It sho is hard to please that woman," sighed Billy. "Aunt Minerva is sof' an' sweet by the side er her. I wisht I war dumb an' that might suit her. When she askt me, 'Am I?' an' I say, 'I ain't,' she raise Cain an' say they ain't no sich a word as ain't; an' when I say, 'I am't,' she say, 'They is not no sich a word as am't.' Now, if'n they is not no sich a word as ain't, an' ain't no sich a word as am't, what in Gawd's grēen world is a fellow to say when he ain't?"

"The properest word to use is am not," said Lina. "Why don't you and Jimmy try to comverse the way Frances and me does, and then Miss Larrimore would not have so much diffumculty with you?"

"Humph! You all time thinkin' you'se so admiral," said Jimmy. "I see folks put-

tin' up they hands an' larfin' behin' 'em when you puts on yo' high-an'-mighty airs. Frances ain't near so proudified as you."

The children were on their way home from school, where they had been undergoing a rather strenuous time. Miss Larrimore had been especially particular on the subject of English, and Billy had been excelled by every pupil. Even Tom Collins had gone ahead of poor Billy.

"I wisht I war black an' could go to school with Wilkes Booth Lincoln! Th' ain't nobody to pester him 'bout aintses an' amses an' not nothing nohows. I think it would be fine to be black, anyhow. Dirt don't show on black an' 'tain't a bit er use for Wilkes Booth Lincoln to wash mo'n once a week, cep'n of co'se 'bout Friday, an' sometimes Thursday, he do git a leetle high, kinder goatish; but niggers don't mind they own smell no mo'n goats do."

"Aw, buck up, Billy! You all time sound like a funeral—you is so melamcholic. Here's a can! Le's kick it."

Kicking a can home from school is about the best fun there is, as every one who has ever been a child knows. It spells ruination for shoes and is hard on chance pedestrians, who are liable to get their shins cut, but it is great sport for the kickers.

Billy forgot his woes and joined in the game, as did also Lina and Frances, whose elegance was only skin deep.

"We mos' got to Baltimo' Row!" cried Frances. "Le's make heaps of noise when we gets there, 'cause old Mr. Carroll may be takin' his nap."

Baltimore Row was a solid block of red brick houses, built flush with the sidewalk, with white marble steps and tiny stoops, projecting just enough to be a menace to the unwary traveler. Mr. Carroll, who con-

sidered himself quite superior to anybody and everybody who lived in Tennessee, being himself a Carroll of Carrollton, had built this block of houses to try in some measure to instill into the souls of these benighted persons who liked deep porches and yards around their homes, that the architecture of Baltimore was the only kind to be considered. The houses were comfortable and well built and did rent well, so Mr. Carroll was a prosperous landlord. He was also a very cross old man, and looked upon children as useless beings, quite as useless as front yards and cozy porches.

He lived in the middle of his own block. To find his house you did not have to look up at the number over the transom, nor at the polished brass doorplate proudly bearing the name of Carroll. The most spotless white doorstep, the cleanest in the whole block, was sure to belong to Mr. Carroll.

He would come out on the sidewalk and march solemnly up and down looking critically at his neighbors' sills, and then go back and have his housekeeper come out and give an extra scrub to his.

He lay in wait for children, always taking for granted that they were going to do something naughty. The Big Four usually lived up to his expectations. Sometimes they would run a stick along his closed blinds, making a most annoying racket. Sometimes they would ring his bell and run. Once Billy managed to stick a pin in the crack by the electric bell and it rang for many minutes before the enraged old man could find out what ailed it. Frances had committed the extreme outrage by hanging a streamer of black crepe from his door knob. Mr. Carroll had spent the whole day in blissful ignorance of what was going on, and wondered at the pile of cards stuck

under the door by the sympathetic neighbors, who had not liked to ring the bell in the house of mourning, and had found no one ready to open the door at their approach, as is the custom.

On that day when can-kicking was the business in hand the noise was enough not only to awaken Mr. Carroll, but all of his dead and gone ancestors, had they been sleeping in Baltimore Row.

"It's my kick now, Billy Hill! Look how much mo' you done scratched up yo' shoes than I is mine. You all time gotter do all the kickin'."

"All right, Jimmy, but kick it up aginst old man Carroll's shutter if you kin hist it that high. I'll let you try," said Billy, generously.

"Old man Carroll
Looks like er barrel!"

shouted Frances and Lina in penetrating

voices. The slats of the upstairs shutters were opened just then, much to their delight. They had succeeded in awakening Mr. Carroll, and now they were annoying him. What more could be desired? They could not see him, but they knew he was glaring down on them through his slatted blinds. Soon he would become so enraged that he would call out to them, and then he would come down and open his front door, but by that time they would be far up the street.

"It's my kick now," Billy insisted.

"Yo' kick nothin'! 'Tain't yo' kick till you kin git it away from me. S'long as I kin keep it it's mine."

"But you made me give it to you when I had it!"

"You did so, Jimmy Garner," put in Lina.

"You know you did!" Frances declared.

"Made you! Made you! Po' little Billy! How'd I make you! I jes fooled you! That's what I done."

"Well, then I'll jes fool you!" screamed Billy, who was peacefully inclined until he felt himself to be imposed upon, and then was as ready to fight as his ancestors had been when taxation without representation was the mooted point, or state's right was in question.

Adroitly he stepped behind Jimmy and tripped him up. Fat little Jimmy went sprawling on the ground, but before Billy could whisk the old tin can from under him Jimmy's nose had received a severe blow from the can. Blood began to stream from that injured member.

Jimmy arose in his fury and made for Billy, bellowing lustily as he tried to wipe the blood away.

"Jimmy, Jimmy! Save the blood!" cried

Frances. "Hold yo' nose an' keep it in an' then let her go on ol' Mr. Carroll's do' step."

Jimmy obeyed. He held tight to his nose and ran to the spotless steps, still damp from the extra scrubbing the housekeeper had just given them. Then he let go and the pent-up flood spouted out, deluging the steps. Up and down he ran, shaking his head violently and stooping well over so that the blood would fall on the marble. The three other children looked on delightedly. This was the most fun they had ever had annoying old Mr. Carroll.

"Blood on his steps an' blood in his eye!
Ain't he mad? Oh, my, oh, my!"

was the poem Lina composed on the spur of the moment, and she shouted it out and Frances joined in.

Suddenly that much abused gentleman opened the front door and dived out, trying

to catch Jimmy, but that youngster eluded him and the Big Four was soon out of sight.

"Where's my can?" asked Jimmy just as soon as they felt themselves to be beyond the reach of the pursuer. "You all time takin' little boy's cans away from them an' bloodyin' up they noses an' then a losin' they cans."

"I never tooked yo' can. I was jes' a foolin' you," twinkled Billy. "I'm pow'ful sorry 'bout yo' nose, but I is sho glad you could bloodgy up the do'step the way you done. I ain't never seen a pussun bleed so big an' red. You 'min' me er pig-killin' time down on the plantation."

This delicate compliment quite consoled Jimmy. It was something to be compared to a pig and praised for the amount of blood he could spout.

CHAPTER X

AUNT CINDY COMES

ILLY had grown to be a sincere believer in the efficacy of prayer. After his impassioned appeal to the Almighty, things began to happen. The very next morning Aunt Minerva had her hair fluffed up, and in a very few days, who should come driving up on the bus with Sam Lamb but Aunt Cindy herself? Billy could hardly believe his eyes when Sam Lamb, with his accustomed flourish, backed his bus up to the sidewalk and Aunt Cindy rolled out.

She had on a stiff purple calico dress and snow white apron; her head was tied up in a gay bandana handkerchief. Yes, it was Aunt Cindy!

"Aunt Cindy! Aunt Cindy! Aunt Cin-

dy's done comed!" cried Billy, leaving his playmates and running with Wilkes Booth Lincoln to the gate. The little darkey beat him running. Before Aunt Cindy addressed a word of greeting to her former charges she reprimanded the little black boy.

"Hi there, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, wherefore yo' so nimble-come-trimble dat you feel called on ter beat white folks a runnin'? Yo' done fergit yo' raisin'. I 'low I'll learn you yo' place whin I gits settled in dis hyar town." Her voice was rough and quarrelsome, but her fat good-natured face was wreathed in smiles, and Wilkes Booth Lincoln paid no more attention to her reprimand than he would have to the growlings of a new-born puppy.

"An' if thar ain't my baby! Lawsamussy, Billy, you is sho growed! Come hyar an' hug yo' mammy." She stretched out her arms and Billy flew straight into them.

What did he care if Jimmy would try to tease him? What difference if he had reached the advanced age of seven going on eight, and was now supposed to be too old to hug women folks? Aunt Cindy was Aunt Cindy, the only mother he had ever known, and he intended to hug her as long as he lived.

It had been many weeks, even months, since he had cried himself to sleep grieving for Aunt Cindy, getting some little comfort from his soft feather pillow, which he hugged close to his faithful little bosom, pretending it was Aunt Cindy, who quite resembled a pillow in shape and consistency. Time had healed the wound caused by his separation from his plantation friends; the Major had come into his life, and he too was nice and soft to lean against and understood what a fellow was thinking about; but no one could ever really take

the place of dear Aunt Cindy. It seemed as if he had always known her loving kindness and care.

"Does Aunt Minerva know you is comin'?"

"Law, chil', she done writ fer me an' I jes' comed 'thout was'in' no stamp on no letter. Tabernickle wa'n't ter home, anyhow, an' he's the onliest one I is trustin' wif co'respondence sence First Thessalonians done writ a letter to the mail order house fer yo' Unc' Jimmy-jawed Jupiter fer a couple er gyardin' hoes, an' they done sint a pair er red stockings. I thunk ter myse'f it war safter jes' to fotch myse'f an' be done."

Aunt Cindy dived back into the bus for her belongings, which she had carefully tied up in old meal sacks. Bumpy baggage, but precious in her eyes. Sam Lamb assisted, quite pleased to be of use.

Aunt Minerva received her new cook with dignity, but Aunt Cindy's genial smile and clean calico dress had its effect on that austere lady. Nobody could be severe very long with Aunt Cindy. She had hardly entered the kitchen before she took complete possession, her fat presence filling every corner. Aunt Minerva felt herself to be in the way, although Aunt Cindy did not say so.

"Jes' tell me what yer wants to eat on fer the nex' meal an' leave ol' Cindy ter knock it up."

"But I must let you know my way, so you will have things as I like them," protested Mrs. Major.

"Lawsamussy, lady, I been a cookin' sence 'fo' yo' was bawn, an' ifn I don' know how ter cook yit I better call dat ere Sam Lamb and hike back ter de plantation. 'Cose I ain't above learnin' new tricks, but

lemme show off some er my ol' ones fust if yo' don' mind."

Miss Minerva did mind, but Aunt Cindy's smile and persuasive manner com-

pletely disarmed her, and she was forced to leave her own kitchen, where she had so long been queen, and let the new cook reign in her stead. She felt repaid for her

docility when her husband came home and seemed so pleased to have her in the sitting room instead of in the kitchen, with her hair arranged the way he liked it, and with her blue dress on that he had helped pick out on their honeymoon.

Aunt Cindy's old tricks proved to be so admirable that Miss Minerva had to confess that there was nothing she could teach the old colored woman in the way of cooking.

"Jes' gib me de 'gredients an' plenty er elbow room an' I kin beat de holy er holies a cookin'," she would say. "Yo' is a good cook, too, Miss 'Nerva, which is out er de order, 'cordin' ter my 'sperience, 'cause yo' is de fus' skinny 'ooman what I ever seed know how ter season. Looks lak skinny folks is too sparin' er sompen in de victuals. Mabbe dey is tryin' ter slimify others. I knowed a 'ooman onct what wa'n't

mo'n skin an' bones an' she could make the putties' quilts yo' ever seed, an' had de cleanes' cabin, but dat ere 'ooman couldn't a fried a aig so a dawg could eat it. She done fed her husban' on can' salmon an' sto' bread 'til th'wan't nothin' fer dat po' nigger ter do but prove hisse'f onfaithful. He et aroun' de neighborhood 'til th'wan't no tellin' whose wedded husban' he war. He 'lowed th'wan't no virtue in baker's bread nohow. An' so th'ain't."

Aunt Minerva was out in the kitchen "giving out provisions." She had the old-fashioned way of keeping house, that is, weighing and measuring the provisions for the day and then locking up the storeroom. She had been doing her own housework for such a long time when locking up and portioning out the food had not been necessary, that this old way of keeping house was most irksome to her; but it was her

mother's method, and the method of her mother's mother, so she felt she must stick to it.

"Whe'fo' yo' feel called on ter be so 'ticular, Miss 'Nerva? Yo' needn't be dolin' out an' lockin' up from ol' Sis Cindy. I ain't nebber took nothin' in my life an' I ain't a goin' ter begin now. 'Tain't lak I had a cabin full er hongry coons ter fill up an' jes' had ter tote ter make en's meet. I ain't got no 'cumbrances at all cep'n ol' Jimmy-jawed Jupiter, an' I done lef' him fer good an' all."

"Left your husband, Aunt Cindy! I am shocked! Why did you leave him?" Miss Minerva Major stopped measuring flour and looked severely at her cook.

"I lef' him 'cause he done lef' me fust. He's de no countes' nigger dey is, an' I's plum tired er his all time gittin' 'ligion. Ev'y big meetin' we was, hyar come ol' Ju-

piter up to de mourners' binch a stickin' out his jimmy-jaw an' arskin' fer de prayers er de combregashun. He cyarn't fool me. He 'liberately falls frum grace so he kin be king buzzard at de big meetin'. Whin de love feas' starts up dere ol' Jupiter is a huggin' all de gals an' a dancin' 'roun', de bigges' sinner presen'. I done heard him 'fessin' ter sins I knowed, an' he knowed I knowed, dat he ain't nebber had de sand ter commit. He laks ter make out he's a bad man jes' fer repertation. I won' say he cyarn't cuss something turrible. But that ain't nothin' but lip sarvice. He's got no mo' lights fer deviltry dan a chicken."

"Is there no possibility of his following you up to town?" and Miss Minerva locked the pantry door and put the key in her pocket.

"No'm, not so's I kin procrastinate! I 'low yo' didn't like what I said about lock-

in' up—did yer, Miss 'Nerva? Now I'm a gonter show yo' som'n. Yo' done locked dat ere do', ain't you? Well, now, look a hyar!" She waddled over to the outside kitchen door, took out the key, waddled back to the pantry, fitted it into the lock, and, presto! the door opened.

"Why, I didn't know those keys were alike!" exclaimed Miss Minerva. "Here I have been living in this house since I was a young girl, and did not know it, and you have been living here only a few days and have found it out."

"I foun' it out one time whin Wilkes Booth Lincoln and Billy got ter playin' wif de kitchen key an' los' it, so I 'sperimented some. Dat was de day yo' done lef' de key in de sto'room do' arfter yo' done lock it up so keerful. Yo' didn't miss nothin' on dat day, did yer, Miss 'Nerva? Well, yo' ain't nebber gonter miss nothin'

so long as yo' trus' me. I could er took all yo' 'visions time an' time agin, but I ain't no call ter take 'em whin I is got plinty to eat. 'Cose, whin niggers feel white folks don't trus' 'em dey is mo'n ap' ter wanter gib 'em sompen ter cry fer."

"Perhaps you are right, Aunt Cindy," said Miss Minerva thoughtfully. She took the key out of her pocket and put it on the table, in her heart glad to be rid of the measuring and weighing she had felt it her duty as a housekeeper to burden herself with.

That evening she said to her husband: "Joseph, I believe Aunt Cindy will prove herself to be valuable to us, and perhaps we had better do as you suggested and build her a room in the back yard. I am afraid she is not very comfortable in the loft over the woodhouse."

"Bully! Bully!" cried Billy. "If we

have buildin' a goin' on we kin have blocks an' sawdust an' sand to play with. Ain't you better put a leetle lean-to to Aunt Cindy's house so's my goat kin have some kinder habertation, when I gets him?"

"Would Aunt Cindy like to live right next to a goat?" laughed the Major.

"Aunt Cindy wouldn't min' no goat; she wouldn't even mind no hawg, after ol' Uncle Jimmy-jawed Jupiter."

CHAPTER XI

CHRISTIAN ZIONS

THERE was a good deal of discussion about the architecture of Aunt Cindy's house. The Major wanted to build two rooms, but his wife thought that would be a useless expenditure. As for Aunt Cindy, she regarded the Major's suggestion as the height of extravagance and declared:

"What I wan't wif two rooms? I ain't nebber had but one in my cabin, an' dat war mo' dan I could keep decent wif dat ol' Jupiter a chawin' an' spittin' all ober de place. Gimme one room an' dat plenty lawge, but ifn you wan' ter please ol' Cindy, jis gib her a po'ch ter set on an' rock whin de day's wuck is done. I allus done been ambitionous ter own a po'ch."

"Didn't you have one on your cabin?" laughed the Major.

"I nebber had nothin' but a leetle flat-form dat wa'n't no bigger'n a baby baid. If I'd git ter rockin' an' dozin', my cheer'd slip one of de rockers off de aidge, if I didn't keep one eye open."

"Well, you shall have a nice porch the length of your room, with plenty of space for rocking," declared the generous master.

When the building began the children were wild with joy. They would hurry home from school, even foregoing the delights of annoying Mr. Carroll in their haste to play in the sand when the foundation was being laid, and, later on, to catch the curly shavings as the lumber was being dressed, and to pick up the blocks of wood with which they could build such delightful little houses.

The much desired porch was at last up,

and the carpenters were fashioning the jig-saw balusters and neatly fitting them in. The blocks now assumed strange shapes, some of them looking like funny faces. These were highly prized by the children, although they were not really quite so nice and convenient to build with as the square blocks.

"Let's play house up on the corner of Aunt Cindy's porch," suggested Lina, who was ever of a domestic turn."

"You all time wantin' to play sissy games," declared Jimmy. "I bid ter be the papa!"

"Well, then, Frances will have to be the mama, because I'd never consent to you for my husband."

"I ain't gonter be the mama! I'm gonter be the grown daughter, with heaps an' loads of beaux what brings me candy ev'y night when they calls," and Frances tossed

her head, which was covered with shaving curls.

"Whose gonter be 'um?" asked Billy. "You kin have Wilkes Booth Lincoln if you want him, but I ain't gonter be no beau lover."

"Wilkes Booth Lincoln wouldn't be 'propriate," ventured the grown daughter. "White people don't never have colored beaux."

"There's a man in the Bible what was colored and went to call on white gals," said Billy, "an' what's good enough for folks in the Bible is good enough for little sissy snips like you an' Lina. His name was Afellow, an' Miss Cecilia 'splained to me how the whitest gal in the whole town ran off an' married him. Miss Cecilia tol' me all they is 'bout it."

"Well, I ain't gonter have a fellow with a black face for a beau if Matthew, Mark,

Luke an' John, Aaron an' Moses all set the fashion.

> Said Aaron to Moses,
> 'Le's cut off our noses!'
> Said Moses to Aaron,
> ''Tis the fashion to wear 'em.'

That shows what Moses thought of styles, but he ain't gonter set the styles for me."

"Well, if you and Jimmy are so stubborn, I reckon I'll have to be the mama," sighed Lina. "You can be the grown daughter and all your beaux can be off on trips, and you can be curling your hair and fixing yourself up for them."

Housekeeping was soon started, with Jimmy and Lina as mother and father, Frances as grown daughter, Billy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln as postman, grocery boy, bus driver, chauffeur, doctor, or any other part that suggested itself to the children.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln had picked up a tiny kitten in the alley by Sam Lamb's house that was immediately put into requisition as the baby. It was forced into one of Gladys Maud's gowns and a cap fitted on its comical little head.

"Don't cry, my darling," crooned Lina, rocking the squirming little animal back and forth as she sat in her chair improvised from blocks. "James!" her tone took on the sharp note children usually assume when the mama is addressing the papa, "I want you to stop in and send the doctor up to see baby. I don't at all like the way her tongue looks." Kitty stuck out her little pink tongue and made all the family laugh.

"Isn't she sweet? Kiss her, papa, before you go for the doctor."

"Kiss her, cat's foot!"

"No, kiss her cat's mouth! Never mind,

won't um cruul papa kiss um ittle eenty weenty baby? Isn't it too bad our baby's got a tail, James?"

"Yes, too bad! Let's saw it off!" Jimmy reached for a saw that one of the carpenters who had struck work for the day had left hanging on a nail.

"Oh, Jimmy, don't, don't," screamed Lina. "How'd you like to have your tail sawed off? Well, if you haven't got one, your leg, then?"

"You all time raising so much fuss about nothin'. Don't puppies git they tails snipped off? an' why not cats? I see a whole family of cats 'thout no tails down to Mr. Griggses."

"They was Manx cats," said Billy. "Maje tol' me they ain't had no tails for generation unto generation of them that hate 'em."

"Well, Miss Cecilia's got a vase full er

cattails in her parlor, an' how you reckon she got 'em if they didn't saw 'em off er pussies," put in Frances. "They are all stiff, but I reckon after they dry out they get stiff."

"Them cattails grows in swamps," murmured Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "Nobody ain't never cut 'em off'n pussies."

"Well, will you never fetch the doctor?" said Lina impatiently. "Your son —daughter—will die before your eyes while you are fooling around."

"Well, where at's my hat at? Where's my chauffeur?"

"Here I is, boss," cried Wilkes Booth Lincoln, grinning from ear to ear. "Yo' artermobile is here, too."

Jimmy climbed into the wheelbarrow used by the workmen to haul bricks and sand, and with a whoop and a toot Wilkes Booth Lincoln started off with him.

They soon returned with Billy impersonating the doctor, with an old hat of the Major's pulled down over his curly pate.

"Ahem! How old is yo' baby, mam?"

"I am not quite sure. My chauffeur can tell you. Lincoln, how old is this ki—baby?"

"He eyes wan't open whin I brung him in out'n de alley, an' 'bout two days arfter dey opened, an' I done had him sence two days 'fo' las' Sunday come three weeks."

"Well, they don't open their eyes until they are eight days old, so he must have been eight days old on Sunday, and this is Thursday, and that makes him—her—three weeks and twelve days old," calculated Frances rapidly.

"I know a lady what is a Christian Zion," said Jimmy, "an' she don't b'lieve in medicine—"

"I wisht Aunt Minerva was a Christian

Zion," sighed Billy. "She is a great han' for castor ile. 'Cose, sence Wilkes Booth Lincoln comed to live here he haster take his share an' I gits off sometime."

"Well, this lady what I knowed 'bout had some kittens—"

"Ladies don't have kittens," teased Frances.

"Well, this lady did, Miss Smarty, an' they eyes was shut tight, an' they was blin', an' she shut her eyes an' prayed an' prayed. An' she 'fused to b'lieve that them kittens was blin', but she kep' on a worryin' over them an' kep' on 'fusin' to b'lieve they was blin', an' kep' on a prayin' an' a sayin' over an' over to herse'f that God was too good to let little kittens stay blin', an' after eight days of wrestlin' with the Lord, sho' nuf them kittens opened they eyes. They was jes' a foolin' all the time, but that lady she called it a muricle an' got up at a 'sperience

meetin' to her church an' tol' everybody how good God was."

"My gran'mammy say dat folks what is too lazy ter wuck jes' sets an' prays," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln. "She don' take much stock in 'zorters. She say don't go a worryin' an' a pest'rin' de A'mighty till yo' is done yo' bes'. Dey is a nigger down at Flat Creek what jes' sets on de bank an' prays fer de feesh ter bite, an' he git he gun an' go in de woods an' set right still up against de tree an' pray fer a rabbit ter come lopin' along. He de lazies' coon in de county, an' sho nuf, de Lord answers his prayers an' he come home wid a strang er feesh ev'y time he go feeshin', an' he kin scar' up a rabbit even arfter de houn' dawgs is been a huntin' thu de woods. My gran'mammy say she don' wan' none er her gran'babies ter be so persuasive wif de Lawd dat dey won' have ter wuck none."

"I wonder if God would answer our prayers if we prayed hard as hard for another kitten, so our little daughter would have a little sister," mused Lina. "We might play we are having family prayers an' all of us pray at once."

"Christian Zions pray to theyselves," said Jimmy. "I heard that lady what had kittens tell my mama so. She said they jes' shet they eyes an' 'clare they ain't nothin' the matter."

"But 'spose they want something like kittens, what do they do then?" asked Lina.

"They calls that a prayin' for soapsuds."

"Oh, Jimmy, soapsuds is nonsense!" corrected Frances. "You know it was supstance. Supstance means any old thing."

"So does soapsuds!"

"Well, le's play like we is Christian Zions an' all of us shet our eyes an' want another kitten," said Jimmy, closing his

eyes so tightly that his lashes were all squeezed up.

"Now, don't anybody peep," commanded Lina.

There was silence for at least two minutes. All of the children were putting their whole minds on praying for substance in the form of another kitten. They were devoutly kneeling.

"Miouw! Miouw!" came in faint tones from under the new house. The little daughter in Lina's arms struggled to be free.

"Miouw! Miouw!" she answered.

"Listen! I heard a pussy somewhere," cried Frances.

"Oh, you all time thinkin' you is hearin' things! That was jes' that there so-called baby Lina is holdin'. Go on prayin'!"

"Miouw!"

"I'm not a going to pray another min-

ute!" Frances declared, jumping up and running down to look under the house. Prayer meeting was broken up and all the children followed. The little daughter, escaping from Lina's clutch and scampering off, looking too ridiculous for words, in

Gladys Maud's long white gown. Her progress was considerably impeded by the unaccustomed clothing, and she was soon recaptured.

Looking through the lattice work that the carpenters had just finished nailing

under the porch, was a tiny white kitten. No doubt it had found its way under Aunt Cindy's house through the alley.

"Now say God ain't good!" challenged Billy.

"Who's sayin' it?" asked Jimmy.

"I reckon we oughter thank Him then," suggested Billy. "If we are real politeful, maybe He'll answer some mo' prayers. I'm a thinkin' 'bout striking Him for a pony by-am-by."

"You all time bein' so greedy, Billy Hill. I am gonter git that pony out of Him if'n there's ary one in Heaven. You is gonter have a goat, an' now they is two kittens comed to yo' house, an' if you git the pony too, it won't be fair. I ain't gonter he'p you pray for no pony, an' the mo' you pray for the one, the mo' I'm gonter pray that it won't come to you. Christian Zions haveter pray all together, one, two, three, go!

If I hadn'ter prayed so hard that kitten never would a comed. I'm the bossest prayerer they is. It oughter be my kitten, 'cause I kin pray so good."

"That ain't a thankin' God for answerin' our prayers," said Billy sternly. "All together now: one, two, three, go!"

"Thank you! God, thank you!" the children cried devoutly, their faces turned up to the sky, from which they sincerely believed the white kitten had dropped.

CHAPTER XII

THE WHISKERED WILLIAM

HE house was done. It was painted white to match the big one, with cool green blinds and a porch "fit'n fer a king," according to Aunt Cindy.

More than enough furniture was found in the loft over the woodhouse to make the room homelike and comfortable. The last block and pile of shavings had been cleared away, and with much pomp and ceremony Aunt Cindy moved in.

While the carpenters were on the place the Major had had them build a stable as a lean-to—on the woodhouse, however, and not on Aunt Cindy's house.

"Maje, ain't that a mighty big stable for a goat?" asked Billy.

"Well, my son, our ideas may grow," twinkled the Major.

"Do ijears haveter stay in a stable, Maje?"

"Sometimes!"

"Is my goat mos' growed up big enough yet?"

"He will be here soon, son."

The Major had found the promised goat, but was waiting for the wagon he had ordered to be built. The goat had been bought from an Irish woman who lived out near Tom Collins's house. He was highly recommended as a sweet-tempered animal of a most kindly disposition.

"What's his name, Maje?"

"His name is Billy, which is most unfortunate. How are we to distinguish between you and the goat?"

"I tell you, Maje, we kin call him William. I guess Aunt Minerva'd like that,

an' then maybe she won't be wantin' to call me by the same name. I sho do hate to be called William. Do you reckon the goat will mind much havin' his name changed? Goats most generally have whiskers, don't they, Maje? An' William sounds kinder whiskerish to me."

"We can try it on him and see if he objects. 'Speak of the angels, and you hear the rustle of their wings.' Look, what's this coming?"

It was Sam Lamb driving a big white goat hitched to a beautiful little wagonette. Sam Lamb was walking by the side of his team, as he was afraid to trust the little vehicle with his weight, which was considerable.

"Oh, my William Goat, my William Goat!" cried Billy. "Ain't he beautiful? Oh, Maje, look at his whiskers! They's prettier than the preacher's. An' look at

my little waggin! It looks like a circus waggin what the clown rides in—an'—an' —it's got a whip socket an' a whip, an' springs an' two seats—an'—an'—an' a step to git in by. Oh, Maje, I sho is glad Aunt Minerva done overcome her 'jections to pants an' married you! You sho is a good goat buyer."

"Is he gentle, Sam?" asked the Major, quite as delighted as Billy over the stylish little turnout.

"Whin you fin's a goat what smells sweet dat may be a gintle goat," said Sam Lamb, "but goats an' gintleness don't go han' in han' as a rule. Dis here goat is a good goer an' has got a back as strong as—as a goat. But he got a evil eye, an' whin he gits ter workin' his whiskers up an' down yo' bes' look out. Onct yo' gits a bit in his mouf he's all right, but he ain't so easy ter hitch up, 'cause he so slippery an' frolicsome.

He mought a been a greased goat whin we started ter git his bridle on. It tuck mos' all de libery stable ter hitch up dis here goat."

The Major laughed. Well knowing Sam Lamb's powers of exaggeration, he did not worry about the frolicsome nature of Mr. William Goat.

"I guess the boys will manage to tame him, eh, Billy?"

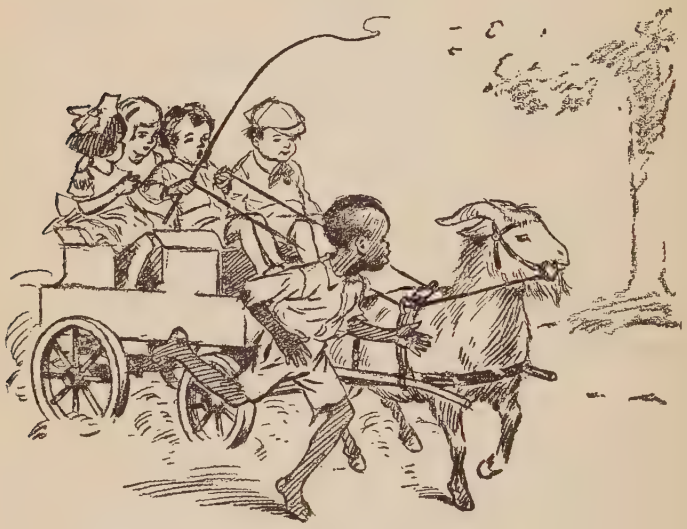
"'Co'se! Down on the plantation me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln been a ridin' the bull ever since we's born, an' I reckon if we kin ride a bull we kin manage little William Goat."

"Well, mebbe so!" was Sam Lamb's pessimistic rejoinder, "but bulls is lambs beside goats. But as I say, whin yo' gits de bit in he is a traxable animule—but gittin' de bit in is de trouble."

"Oh, Maje, kin I drive him now?"

"Certainly! Jump in! Where is Jimmy? He must be included in the trip."

"Yes, an' Aunt Minerva mus' see, too. She ain't never been partial to goats, but



she'll jes' haveter like William Goat, whiskers an' all—an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln—an' Aunt Cindy!"

Quite a crowd was collected to witness the trial trip of the two Williams. Jimmy

came running in answer to Billy's whistle, also Lina and Frances. In a moment Aunt Cindy waddled around the house with Wilkes Booth Lincoln, who had been released from the chores she was having him perform. Aunt Minerva left her sewing and joined them. Miss Cecilia ran across the street to see the new possession of her little friend. Mrs. Garner, attracted by the crowd, came out too, also Mrs. Hamilton and Mrs. Black. Sarah Jane grabbed up Bennie Dick and, with him tucked under her arm, she too joined the spectators.

"Git in, Jimmy!" Billy's tone was very important as he held the new reins jauntily.

"Sho will, Billy!" Jimmy bounced in by his friend.

"Can't we go too?" pleaded Lina and Frances.

"Sho, git in!" from the proud coachman.

"Can the goat pull so many, Sam?" asked the Major.

"Why, dat 'ere goat kin pull as much as he kin butt, an' I tell yer, Major, he could butt down this whole crowd er folks, countin' Sis Cindy an' Sis Mary Jane, an' dey is some hefty."

"I wisht they was room for Wilkes Booth Lincoln, too," said Billy wistfully. "I been a talkin' 'bout drivin' a goat to Wilkes Booth Lincoln ever since we's born."

Billy did not at all relish having the wagon filled with white children and his dear colored friend left out. The little black boy smiled reassuringly. He was happy to be in Billy's mind, if not in the goat wagon.

"Tha's all right, Billy, you'n me'll git many a ride wif dat ol' goat."

The goat may have been difficult to manage without a bit, but he proved most

docile in harness. Billy cracked the tiny whip and with the reins well in hand they started off.

"Why, the boy can drive!" exclaimed the proud Major.

"Yes, he can drive only too well," acquiesced his wife, remembering sadly what a whip her handsome, wild brother-in-law had been. "It is in the blood."

The goat took them for a mad spin down the street of the quiet little town, and all the neighbors came running out to see what the Big Four could be up to. Even the severest critics of the children could not deny that they made a pretty picture seated in the tiny wagon with the great white goat pulling them as though he enjoyed it.

"It sho is a tight fit in here," said Jimmy. "I hearn a gent say onct when he was a takin' his girl buggy ridin' an' she 'splained it was a tight fit, that it was a good thing

'cause you couldn't git a 'spicion between 'em."

"Well, you is takin' up mo'n yo' share er seat," said Billy. "Why don't you cross yo' legs? That would ease her up some."

"You know I can't cross my legs. You all time wantin' little fat boys to cross they legs," declared Jimmy, much offended.

"Don't you want to drive some?" asked Billy.

Hurt feelings were healed immediately as Jimmy took the reins. He found to his amazement that driving was not so easy as he had imagined.

"What makes this here fool goat all time go sideways?"

"That's 'cause you pull on one rein too much. Let me show you!"

"Show me nothin'! You all time thinkin' you is so smart."

The goat continued to go sideways.

This course carried him directly through a pile of sand in front of the church where much needed repairs were under way.

"Pull on the other rein!" shouted Billy, but it was too late. Over they went, wagon full of children, goat and all.

"Now see what you done!" cried Billy, jumping up and shaking the sand out of his curls.

"You he'p me git out of this waggin. I's squzzed in so tight I can't budge," and indeed Jimmy's fat legs were wedged in between the seat and the dashboard so that it took much tugging of all the children to extricate him. The little girls had taken a neat tumble in the soft sand and seemed rather to enjoy the experience.

The wagon was righted and found to be unhurt. As for William Goat, he was quite content to lie down and nibble on the end of the shaft, that this new position made

accessible, but he was forced to arise with the vehicle.

"Why didn't you pull on the other rein when I told you?" insisted Billy, who was still trembling with the excitement of the turnover, which he was afraid might have injured his much prized possession.

"'Cause the Bible says that goats mus' all time go to the lef' an' I wa'n't a goin' to go back on the Bible. Miss Cecilia 'splained it to me one time, an' she is the bestes' 'splainer they is. She says God says goats mus' go to the lef' an' sheeps to the right. Now, if'n I had a been drivin' a sheep I'd a kep' to the right, but this ol' billy goat was diffunt. He wouldn't never a got to Heaven if'n I hadn'ter driv him thataway."

"Well, I can't see that he is in Heaven yet," laughed Lina.

"You don't know yo' lef' han' from right,

anyhow, Jimmy Garner," jeered Frances.

"I do so! You all time sayin' I don't know my lef' han' from my right. My lef' han' is the one with the warts on it," and Jimmy triumphantly held up a chubby fist well peppered with warts.

"I ain't a gonter let you drive my goat no mo' 'til you gits warts on both han's," declared Billy. "You better go hunt you a hop-toad."

The grown-ups had witnessed the turn-over from Miss Minerva's sidewalk. The children were on their feet so soon that their fears for their safety were soon allayed.

"It might have broken the wagon," said Miss Minerva severely. "I do not at all approve of such expensive toys for children. There is no telling what that goat and vehicle cost."

"No, I know there isn't," declared the

Major. He was sure he was not going to tell anyone, least of all his wife. He had the receipts for the harness and wagon and goat locked safely in his desk at his office, and there he meant them to stay. The outfit had been expensive, more so than he cared to confess.

"You should not have done it, Joseph. You spoil the boy."

"I believe not! I think Billy could not be spoiled. I am only spoiling myself. Just think, my dear Minerva, how long I have wanted some young thing to give a billy goat to. I am sure this is the proudest and happiest moment of my life—ahem!—except, of course, the moment when I realized you were mine, my dear."

CHAPTER XIII

WHOOPING COUGH SCHOOL

DON'T see no use in no mo' school," Jimmy announced. "Ain't we learned howter read mos' ev'ything they is?"

"I can't read all the books Maje is got," said Billy. "I sho do wanter. Maje says books is the bestes frien's he's got, an' he says one of the things 'bout books is you can shet 'em up when you wants ter, an' yo' frien's you can't shet up nohow."

"Can't the Major learn you all the res' 'thout yo' goin' on to school? I reckon my papa could learn me 'cept'n' he is too triflin'. My mama says she wisht she could make my papa work the way Miss Minerva done the Major."

"She never made him!" said Billy indig-

nantly. "He jes' natchelly would work so's Aunt Minerva would send for Aunt Cindy. The Maje 'lowed he'd tire out Aunt Minerva, an' he done it, all right. He made Aunt Minerva right 'shamed goin' befo' folks with a ap'on tied up under his chin."

"I shouldn't wonder if Miss Larrimore didn't git her a husband some time. She ain't as old as Miss Minerva Major. She's all time so strict or I reckon she'd a had one 'fo' now."

"Maybe she's so busy she can't git no chanct to fin' a beau," suggested Billy.

"I sho do wisht we could help her some. Ifn she didn't have to keep school maybe she could have time. Now s'pose all the kids in the primer class tooked sick to onct, then po' Miss Larrimore might could get out on the street an' dress herself up an' ketch a beau. Th'ain't never no tellin'."

"That's so! Let's ketch somethin' an' give it to the others. I reckon Miss Larrimore would be right glad if we could do that."

"Bully! What le's ketch?" Jimmy was up and ready to go catch anything to promote Miss Larrimore's matrimonial future.

"Hookin' cough is a nice 'zease. One time all er Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's chilluns had hookin' cough together, all 'cep' Wilkes Booth Lincoln, an' me'n Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never had hookin' cough since we's born."

"'Tain't hookin' cough! You all time callin' things hookin' cough."

"I thought it was hookin' cough, 'cause folks ketched it. Jes' kinder retched out with a hook an' ketched it," explained Billy.

"You don't retch out an' ketch it anymo' than you do mumps, like we got las' spring, an' mumps ain't called hookin' mumps. It's

hoopin' cough, 'cause when it gets started it goes roun' an' roun' amongst the chilluns jes' like a barrel hoop. That's the reason they call it hoopin' cough. When you don't understand things you jes' come ask yo' Uncle Mun," and Jimmy looked very important with his superior knowledge.

"Sam Lamb's baby is got the barrel-hoop cough, 'cause I hearn Aunt Sukey a tellin' Aunt Cindy that she mustn't let Wilkes Booth Lincoln come aroun' there. We might hurry up an' ketch it right this minute. We mus' let Lina an' Frances in on this or they'll git mad like they done that time 'bout the cussin' 'thout sayin' no bad words, an' be a 'phomin' Aunt Minerva or somethin'."

"Sho we'll let 'em in, an' they kin be a ketchin' it along with us mens," acquiesced Jimmy.

Lina and Frances were perfectly willing to get in on the whooping cough strategy. Tom Collins was taken in too, also Wilkes Booth Lincoln. Together they went to call on Sam Lamb and his wife Sukey. Sam Lamb was at work at the livery stable, as they had expected him to be, and Sukey was out carrying home the clothes she had laundered. The baby, who was suffering with the coveted disease, was being minded by his little sister, Lorena, a child of six.

Lorena ushered in the many visitors with great joy. It had been a lonesome day for the little girl, with all the other children at school. The baby was cross and unruly. Whenever he coughed very hard she was instructed to hold him upside down and beat him on the back. The visitors were much delighted over this feat, and when a coughing fit seized the infant they took turns holding him as directed. Certainly

they gave themselves every opportunity to get what they came for.

They were much disappointed when the next day dawned and they were not coughing.

"Ain't you got it yit?" Billy inquired of Jimmy as the two boys started to school.

"No! I ain't got a thing."

They joined Lina and Frances, who reported themselves as failures in the way of catchers, too.

"That baby of Sam Lamb's is a stingy kid. He all time won't give folks nothin'," said Jimmy.

Almost two weeks passed and the desire for whooping cough had left the children. Thanksgiving had come and gone, and Christmas was in the air.

"I'm sho glad that ol' hoopin' cough ain't a rollin' our way," said Jimmy as they were coming home from school.

WM. DONAHEY.

"Zo ab I," acquiesced Billy. "I'b god gold enough 'thout do hoobin' cough." A violent sneezing ensued, and when Billy had exhausted his supply of sneezes Jimmy took it up.

"Now you all time makin' me sneeze," he declared.

"I wish you'd bake be sdob sneezin'," laughed Billy.

"Lina an' Frances is got colds too. Looks like 'mos' ev'ybody in school is tooked cold. Miss Larrimore was a tryin' to choke down coughin' an' sneezin' all day. I betcher th'ain't no beau lover gonter want Miss Larrimore if they sees her with a red nose."

Sam Lamb's baby had not been so stingy with his germs as Jimmy had accused him of being. The six children who had called on him had each caught an obliging germ which had made itself busy, as is the way

with germs. They had increased and multiplied until there were enough to go around the whole primer class and to spare. Out of the forty children in the class ten were already down with whooping cough. The other thirty promptly responded to the inoculation, and at the same time Miss Larrimore, who was old enough to have put away all childish things, decided on a rejuvenation, and of the whoopers that whooped in that town Miss Larrimore outdid them all.

"Ain't it grand, Billy? No school for six weeks! Doc Sandford done said so."

"But ain't you heard the news, Jimmy? Miss Larrimore jes' done finished 'phomin' Aunt Minerva. I reckon she is talkin' to yo' mama now. She says that ev'y las' kid in the primer class is tooked with the hoopin' cough, an' she is tooked too, an' she is gonter have a hoopin' cough school, so we

won't miss nothin'." Billy had a glum look as he made this dampening revelation.

"Oh, gee!" But Jimmy's agony of mind was interrupted by a spasm of coughing that left him speechless for the moment.

"I wisht I hadn'ter promised God I wouldn't say that pretty cuss I made up no mo'. I'd sho say it now," declared Billy, picking up the tune where Jimmy left off, whooping like any wild Indian.

"Ain't she the ungratefulles' 'ooman they is? I wisht we ain't never tried to fix it so's she could dress up an' have time to go out on the street an' ketch a beau. Miss Larrimore's all time having hoopin' cough school jes' to spite little boys."

When the whooping cough school was assembled, Miss Larrimore made a little speech of welcome, punctuated by occasional spasms of coughing. The etiquette in whooping cough is, when one person be-

gins to cough, all must join in. This they did in that whooping cough school with great gusto. When the storm subsided all of them would laugh, and the teacher would join in the merriment. The primer class suddenly found itself liking Miss Larrimore. Some of them went so far as to love her.

"She's a game ol' spo't," declared Jimmy to his companions.

"It looks like hoopin' cough is done ripened her," mused Billy. "Gettin' the hoopin' cough is mos' as good for real good folks like Aunt Minerva an' Miss Larrimore as gettin' married. Aunt Minerva is sho diffunt sence the Maje come to live to our house. I wonder when the teacher gits over hoopin' cough if she'll git stiff agin. It's a pity gittin' married ain't ketchin' like the hoopin' cough, 'cause when folks git married they mos' ginerally stay that-a-

way. 'Co'se hoopin' cough is jes' tremorary."

The first lesson the teacher gave on that memorable morning when she coughed herself into the hearts of her pupils was a spelling lesson, and the word was a longer one than the primer class had tackled up to that time. She wrote in large letters on the blackboard:

WHOOPING COUGH

"Anything we know as much about as we do of this disease, we must learn to spell and to write. Of course it is called whooping cough because when we have it we whoop like wild Indians. How many of you know that?"

All hands went up but William Green Hill's.

"Why, Billy, didn't you know it?" said Miss Larrimore.

"No'm; I been a thinkin' 'twas hoopin'

cough 'cause it rolls aroun' like a barrel hoop from chilluns to chilluns."

"Who told you such a ridiculous thing?"

"My Uncle Mun!"

When school was dismissed Billy reproached Jimmy for holding up his hand when he had not known what whooping cough meant.

" 'Twas actin' a lie, an' that is jes' as bad as tellin' one."

"No sech a thing! You all time sayin' I'm a fibber. Teacher had jes' tol' us what it meant, an' when she ast us how many of us knowed it, I reckon I knowed it as well as anybody, 'cause ain't she jes' that minute got thu a tellin' us?"

CHAPTER XIV

LETTERS TO SANTA CLAUS

BETCHER I'm a gonter git mo' Chris'mus gif's than anybody mos'," announced Jimmy. "I done hooked one er Sarah Jane's stockings off the line to hang up, an' that 'ooman's laigs is the bigges' in town. Why, they is room in one of them stockin's for a gran' pianer."

"I'd be scairt ol' Santy might think it was meant for Sarah Jane an' put a nigger baby or sompen in it," said Billy. "When he comes down yo' chimbly an' sees that big red stocking he is sho gonter think he's got in the wrong cabin."

"Oh, shucks! I done writ a note to pin on the toe," and Jimmy dived in his pocket and with some difficulty extracted a rum-

pled piece of paper. "My pants is growin' littler all the time. It looks like th'ain't room in 'em for me an' a letter to Santy at the same time. This is what I writ," handing the epistle to Billy with pardonable pride:

> deeR saNty this here sok is ment fur JIMMY GARNUR what is a good lidle boy the holly bibble says you mus fill sox til thay runith over. put the buyzickle on the flo.
>
> yore lovin knees
>
> JIMMY.

"You ain't no niece," laughed Billy, impressed by the cleverness of his friend, but rather pleased to see this fault in the letter.

"Well, you needn't say so, so loud that Santy might hear you. Jes' 'fo' Chris'mus Santy is all time listenin' 'roun'. I know I ain't his niece, but when Lina wrote to Dr. Sandford to bring her mama a baby she ended it that-a-way an' Dr. Sandford said

he was goin' to bring the baby jes' 'cause she signed it up so cute."

"Well, if you don't look out, Santy will bring you a girl's wheel, an' then won't you look foolish?"

"Oh, gee! Gimme a pencil an' rubber," cried the scribe frantically. "What mus' I put?"

"Put nephew!"

"I don't know how to spell nephew."

"That's easy—n-e-f, nef—y-o-u, you—nephew."

So with tongue in the corner of his mouth, head on one side, puffing and panting with the exertion, Jimmy rubbed out "lovin knees" and wrote "lovin nefyou."

"Ain't it nice to know how to write so good? I betcher me'n you kin write 'mos' as good as Miss Larrimore. I reckon we won't haveter go to school no mo' after this year, 'cause we'll know everythin' they is

to know. I know 'mos' everythin' now."

"I want to know how to read all of Maje's books, so I reckon I'll stay on to school a spell longer after you quit," said Billy modestly. "I don't think primers is much fun to read, 'cause I pretty near goes to sleep when we have to keep on a sayin': Can the dog run—The dog can run—See my kite in the sky— Maje reads bully things to me of evenings while Aunt Minerva is sewing. First Aunt Minerva thought maybe he ought to read all the time out of the Bible or that old book 'bout Abraham Davis an' Jefferson Lincoln, but the Maje said, 'Pooh! pooh!' and pinched Aunt Minerva's cheek. It do beat me how Maje done got around Aunt Minerva. I reckon fightin' Indians an' Yankees so long done got him kinder hardened, so's he ain't a mite afraid of her. It looks like he gives in to her jes' 'nough to make her think she's

boss. He got a cute way of makin' out Aunt Minerva done started the plan when he wants to do something. He'll say"—and here Billy puffed out his cheeks and stuck out his stomach in imitation of his beloved Major—" 'My dear, as you suggested, I think it will be well for me to take Billy Christmas shopping this afternoon. It was like your generosity to think it well that he should purchase a few simple gifts for his friends down on the plantation. They have been so kind to him it is surely right for us to show them in some measure our appreciation.' Aunt Minerva ain't never said peep turkey 'bout sendin' nothin' to the niggers down there, but she ain't got the spunk to say so, an' I'm a goin' this very day, me'n the Maje, an' we's gonter get a gif' for ev'y las' one of them."

Billy, by the hardest, most concentrated thinking, could recall three Christmases,

and none of them had been in the least like this one. The first one he could remember —he must have been about four—had been very sad. Aunt Cindy had put her head in the nursery door every now and then where he and Wilkes Booth Lincoln were trying to make believe they were playing, and the old woman's cheeks were wet with tears, and sobs were shaking her great frame. Billy's mother had breathed her last on Christmas morning, and Santa Claus had forgotten to visit the plantation.

The next year the good old man had made up for his oversight of the Christmas before, and Billy was sure he must have had a sleigh as big as a hay wagon to hold all of the toys he found piled up under his overflowing stocking on that happy Christmas morning. His father and Santa Claus must have arrived at about the same time, because in the night the little boy had been

sure he had heard his father's voice mixed up with sleigh bells, but his father had assured him he had come to the plantation by the night boat, and of course reindeer had brought Santa Claus.

That was a very wonderful Christmas. His father had spent days and days with his son, and such a bright, amusing father he was. He had had a twinkle in his eye similar to the one the Major had, only the Major's eyes were grey and scrooched up with little wrinkles in the corners, while his father's eyes had been black, and very large and restless, like a race horse's.

There were moments when Billy yearned acutely for his father, but having learned from a certain something in his aunt's manner when her brother-in-law was mentioned that the subject was not a happy one to discuss in her presence, he had gradually given up speaking of him. He wondered if the

Major felt the same way about his father. His mother he remembered as one does a picture. He would gaze at the miniature Aunt Minerva had in the parlor, and it would seem to him to be just a small copy of some larger picture and that picture was his mother. Perhaps her long illness had something to do with the feeling of unreality he had for her.

His father was still a living, breathing person to the boy. He had never seen him ill, but always well and active — glowing with restless energy. After his wife's death he had come to the plantation on short visits, but had made his home in Memphis, where he had planned to bring his son when older. In the meantime Aunt Cindy and the old plantation home seemed to be the only solution for the little boy.

The last Christmas William Green Hill had spent before he came to Aunt Minerva's

to live had been a gay one. His father had come home, bringing with him a large party. The old house rang with the laughter of the young people. There had been music and dancing and feasting. Aunt Cindy had looked almost as sad as she had two years before when her mistress had died, but she had said nothing, and had carefully wiped away the tears that tried so hard to fall in the pies she was baking for her master's guests.

"Men folks is men folks," she sighed. "Here we had to hol' Marse Will ter keep him from 'mittin' vi'lence on hisse'f whin Miss Marga'et died, an' two year ain't passed an' he is de gayes' of de gay. I ain't got no mo' symputhy fer a widowman dan I is fer a pusson what is had a nightmar' an' is gonter wake up an' fin' out it is all a dream. I reckon we'll be havin' a new mis-t'ess down hyar 'fo' long."

But Aunt Cindy's prognostications came to naught, as only a few weeks passed before her master was laid to rest by the side of his young wife, and his boy went to live with the strict Miss Minerva, who had never forgiven Billy's father for running off with her younger sister Margaret.

"Maje," asked the little boy as he and his old friend were on their way to the main street where the shopping in their town was confined, "is you ever seed Santy Claus?"

"No, my boy! Have you?"

"No, I ain't perzackly seed him, but one time I smelt him. He smelt jes' like you an' my father smells, kinder backerish an' wiskerish an' shavin' soapish. It was in the night time an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln an' me'd done hunged up our stockin's, like we been a doin' ever since we's born, 'cept'n one Christmas we hunged 'em up an' Santy passed us by. But that time we'd hunged 'em up an'

prayed to Santy not to forgit us an' gone to bed an' to sleep, when all of a suddent I woked up and smelt that good men's smell, but they wa'n't nobody in the room. I riz up in bed an' there I seed the firelight a shinin' on my new drum what Santy had jes' lef', an' a jumpin' Jack was a stickin' his head through a big hole in the toe of Wilkes Booth Lincoln's ol' stockin'. An' my stockin' was a bus'in' open with things. I wisht I could a seed him, but smellin' is mighty clost to seein', ain't it, Maje?"

"It certainly is. But now we must begin to think about what we want to send your colored friends down on the plantation; also the many friends you have here in town."

"Aunt Cindy wants a gol' front tooth wusser'n anything else. She says she's been a wantin' a gol' front tooth an' a po'ch all her life, an' now she's got the po'ch, the gol' front tooth is all she craves."

"Well, well, poor Aunt Cindy! I thought she had very good teeth."

"So she is! She ain't never had the tooth-ache in her life, an' her teeth is jes' as soun' as gravestones, but she 'lows when she gets five dollars ahead she is gonter have one of her white teeth pulled out an' a gol' one put in. Aunt Cindy says she won't be able to res' quiet in her grave less she gits a gol' tooth 'fo' she dies."

"Well, then, we can just give Aunt Cindy five dollars for our Christmas gift and she can expend it as she sees fit," laughed the Major good-humoredly. So Aunt Cindy's name was crossed off Billy's rather staggering list.

"Aunt Blue-gum Tempy is 'dicted to dippin' snuff, so I reckon a box of snuff would tickle her some. She is right fond of a drap of something, too, but Aunt Minerva says 'tain't 'spectable to give niggers a drap of

something, so maybe the snuff would be best."

"Maybe it would," said the Major.

"Peruny Pearline would admire to have some Kink-Oh-No. I heard Sarah Jane a-tellin' Sukey about how it done straightened her hair out till it looks like a mare's tail. Uncle Snake-bit Bob would like a mouth organ mo'n anything, 'cause he is a nigger what is got music a itchin' all over him. Uncle Pill-jerk Peter is a great han' to want medicine ever since the time he done save all his chillun an' kilt his wife with the same pill."

"What kind of medicine, son?"

"Oh, he ain't 'ticular! He likes it to be brown an' bitter — so it makes him shake all over with nastiness. Aunt Blue-gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's chilluns is devils for candy an' nuts an' oranges. Aunt Blue-gum Tempy says th' ain't no use in was'n' money

on toys for them pickaninnies—jes' give 'em something sweet an' sticky an' they is happy. She says they is better off with a ol' tin can an' some empty spools than all the toys you kin buy at the sto'. But they cries for candy an' 'lasses. Sometimes when they gits to frettin' too much for sweet stuff Aunt Blue-gum Tempy gives 'em a treat of worm candy an' then she don't hear no mo' from 'em for quite a spell."

The Major smiled. Billy loved to talk about the life on the plantation, but Aunt Minerva discouraged any mention of it. The Major, however, liked to listen to his little friend's artless prattle concerning the doings and sayings of his colored acquaintances.

"Aunt Blue-gum Tempy done raised all her gran' babies on a feather dipped in 'lasses. She jes' sets 'em up an' gives 'em the feather an' they pulls it from one han' to

the other an' the stickier they gits the harder it is to pull the feather off, an' the mo' it sticks the happier they is."

"What do you want to give Wilkes Booth Lincoln for his Christmas gift?"

"I done settled that with Santy."

"How's that?"

"I writ him a letter an' I tol' him not to bring me nothin' a tall, but to bring a wheel to Wilkes Booth Lincoln. You see, it looks like it don't make no diffunce how much black folks asts Santy for things, he don't pay no 'tention. He jes' brings them gloves an' handkerchers an' other things what they ain't got no earthly use for; but seein' as white folks buys all the gloves an' handkerchers they needs in the sto's, Santy pays 'tention to they letters an' mos' generally answers they letters a heap quicker'n God does they prayers. I jes' tol' Santy that I could worry 'long without a wheel for another

year, but for him please to bring my bicycle to Wilkes Booth Lincoln."

"What did you do with your letter?"

"Sent it up the chimbly, of course!"

"Didn't you ask for anything for yourself?"

"No, sir; I didn't want to pester him too much, 'cause I sho do want him to be good to Wilkes Booth Lincoln. Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't never had what he wanted yet."

"Did he say he wanted a wheel?"

"'Co'se not!"

"How do you know he does then?"

"I knows by the way his eyes bugged out when Jimmy was blowin' 'bout how Santy was a goin' to bring him one. Wilkes Booth Lincoln had that 'spression a nigger always gets when somebody takes to talkin' 'bout watermelon in the winter time, a kinder look of cravin' when th' ain't no use."

"Wouldn't you feel lonesome if Santy brought Jimmy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln bicycles and did not bring you one?"

"Well, I'd have my William Goat an'—an'—you."

The Major held his little friend's hand very tightly after that. He did not seem to mind at all being classed with the goat.

The box was filled and sent off to the plantation. Surely such an amusing Christmas package was never delivered by an express company before. Nuts and oranges and candy consorted with hair straightener, porous plasters, mouth organs, nasty brown medicine, doll babies, drums, horns, blue-mass pills, snuff (also a "drap" of something for poor Aunt Blue-gum Tempy, who surely needed some comfort if it ever was needed, as she had the raising of all Peruny Pearline's many children).

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTMAS MORNING

MISS MINERVA, after much persuasive eloquence on the part of Billy and the Major, had consented to let Wilkes Booth Lincoln spend the night before Christmas in Billy's room. A cot had been made up for the little colored boy, none other than the old lounge from the attic over the woodshed. It was a lumpy bed with broken and bent springs, but the child was as supremely happy as though it had been made of the softest down. Could he not lie there and gaze upon his Billy? What more could a little black boy want?

Together they had hung their stockings, one at each end of the mantel. Billy had printed his name in large crooked letters

and pinned it to the toe of his stocking, but Wilkes Booth Lincoln was a stumper for both scholars, and they gave up trying to write out such an impossible name. Billy decided the thing to do was to write: "Not Billy's," which he accordingly did in his very best style, pinning it to his friend's much darned stocking, and the two boys went happily to bed with perfect faith that the good Saint Nick would soon visit them.

"I wisht we could see him whin he cames," whispered Wilkes Booth Lincoln across the firelit space that separated him from his friend.

"That's the only thing I got aginst ol' Santy. I can't see what makes him so shy. He done showed hisself onct to the man in the po'try what Maje read to us las' night, an' I can't see why he don't show hisse'f to two little boys what thinks mo' of him than ol' mens."

"Dat war mighty puty po'try, Billy, but what kinder thin's war dey the Major done read 'bout dancin' in de chilluns haids? Do you reckon it war some kinder cunjer? Seemed strange to me whin he jes' got through a sayin': 'Not a critter war stirrin', not even a mouse,' an' den he mentioned all dem things a dancin' in de chillun's haids."

Billy almost rolled out of bed with giggles. He explained the lines to Wilkes Booth Lincoln's satisfaction. "The Night Before Christmas" had been brought home by his old friend and read with great gusto, even Aunt Minerva approving the ever delightful classic. Wilkes Booth Lincoln had listened big eyed as the Major gave a dramatic rendering of the poem.

Now as the boys lay in bed waiting for the sleep to which they knew they must succumb before Santa Claus would venture down the chimney, they both thought over

the poem. Certain lines kept ringing in Billy's head giving him the satisfaction that combinations of words have for anyone with an instinct for poetry.

> And then in a twinkling I heard on the roof
> The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

Over and over he said it to himself until he dozed and almost fancied he heard the prancing and pawing of the tiny reindeer above his head.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln's mind was occupied, too, but with a much more weighty matter than a combination of words.

"Say, Billy, is yo' 'sleep?"

"Not—quite—"

"Well, Billy, what you reckon made de ge'man sick?"

"What gentleman?"

"Why de one in de po'try!"

"He wasn't sick," grunted Billy.

"Well, what made him th'ow up de hash den?"

"Hash?"

"Yes, hash! Didn't de Major done read 'bout his takin' a night-cap an' rushin' to de winder an' tearin' open de shutter an' th'owin' up de hash?"

"Not hash, Wilkes Booth Lincoln, sash!" cried Billy, going off into convulsions of laughter.

"Lawsamussy, Billy, whoever heard of a ge'man eating' a sash? You is plum foolish."

"A sash is a kinder winder, Wilkes Booth Lincoln. I reckon folks can throw up winders 'thout eatin' 'em," explained Billy, and his little friend being satisfied, they soon dropped into happy slumber.

* * * * * * * * * *

"Chrisum gif'!"

"Chrism'us gif'!"

"I cot yer, Billy!"

"You sho did," yawned Billy, trying to get his eyes all the way open, "but you mos' didn't. I commenced to say Chris'mus befo' you got through sayin' gif'."

"Do you reckon it's mawnin'?"

"'Cose it's mornin'. It's mos' light out doors. Le's look at our stockin's!"

Both boys bounded out of bed, Billy making for his stocking, the little black boy for

his. The room was almost dark. The fire had burnt itself out. Through the window, which Miss Minerva had opened extra wide, deeming Billy's roommate made much ventilation necessary, there sifted a pale grey light which meant that day was coming if not come. Billy closed the window hastily before he examined his stocking, which gave his companion time to get ahead of him.

"Geewhilikins, Billy! My stockin' is plum bus'in' open. But look! Santy is done got us mixed up after all. He done put yo' w'eel on my side of the fi'place. Here, Billy, take yo' w'eel!"

"'Tain't my wheel, it's yours. I reckon Santy kin read printin' an' I printed as plain as day that that wasn't my stockin'."

"But Santy don't bring w'eels to nigger boys. You is off yo' bean, Billy."

But he does if white boys asts him to, an' I writ a letter an' tol' him not to mind about

bringin' no wheel for me, an' to bring you one i'stead."

"Oh, Billy, you is as good as—as—the little Jesus," and in saying that, Wilkes Booth Lincoln meant no sacrilege. "I ain't a gonter ride the w'eel 'nless you says so. You mus' do jes' lak it war yo'se, but I'd be happy as a king to speak lak it war mine—'fo' dat ere Jimmy Garner an' Tom Collinses."

"But, honey, it is yours. When Santy gives folks good gif's they mus' 'cep' 'em jes' like they would if the Lord sent 'em. What would Santy think of me if I tol' you when you must ride your own wheel what he brought down the chimbly to you?"

The little darkey was squatting on the floor in front of the new bicycle, his hands clasped as though in prayer, his bumpy, bursting stocking clutched to his fluttering heart.

"Look, here is a tag on it and a name,"

cried Billy. "See if we can read what it says. I hope Santy writes plain."

Santa had written "plain." By the dim light Billy spelt out WILKES BOOTH LINCOLN, sounding the syllables as Miss Larrimore had taught him.

"Why, it's your name! and it ain't so hard to write after all. Santy is sho a good plain printer. He says: 'Merry Christmas to all—and to all good night,' jes' like in the poem."

"Ain't you gonter look at yo' stockin', Billy?"

"Why, yes, I was so plum tickled over your wheel I done forgot." Billy sat down on the floor by his friend and dived into his stocking, which proved to be filled with things dear to the hearts of boys at Christmas.

"What dat over in de cornder behin' dat cheer?" asked Wilkes Booth Lincoln, as the winter sun got slowly out of bed and at last

decided to give a little light in Billy's room.

Billy jumped up to investigate.

"It's another wheel!" he exclaimed in wonder. It was well hid behind a big chair. "Look, there's a tag on that, too," and he spelled out: "For Billy, who forgot to tell me what he wanted."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was quite as happy over Billy's wheel as Billy had been over his. Nothing but fear of Miss Minerva kept them from getting on and riding right there in the bedroom.

"Let's go catch the Maje Chris'mas gif' an' show him what Santy done brung us," suggested Billy. Hurriedly they dressed and silently crept out. They ran against the Major on the way to the bathroom.

"Christmas gift!" shouted that veteran before they could catch him. He was duly surprised at the wonderful presents Santa had left in Billy's room. He wanted to hear

all about Wilkes Booth Lincoln's astonishment and delight over his wheel. When Billy told him how his little black friend had insisted Santa had make a mistake and it really belonged to him, the Major smiled and patted Wilkes Booth Lincoln's woolly head with a very friendly hand.

"You are too extravagant, Joseph," Aunt Minerva had declared. "It is bad enough for you to spend so much for our nephew, but for that negro boy, it is sinful, positively sinful."

"Not at all, my dear; not at all! I really saved money by getting those two wheels. That hardware man had owed me a sum of money for legal services for many months and the only way I could get my bill was by taking it out in trade. Besides, I wouldn't have missed that look on Wilkes Booth Lincoln's face for millions, not for millions."

CHAPTER XVI

JIMMY IN THE BANISTER

IT could not be denied that there existed a certain antagonism between the Major and Jimmy Garner. Jimmy, like all teasers, could not stand being teased and there was something about the little boy that made it impossible for the Major to resist teasing him.

Perhaps the Major bore him a grudge for the reputation Jimmy had given him of being a blood smearer, thereby so nearly wrecking the friendship between Billy and the Major. Who knows? The Major was, after all, just a little boy grown big and old, and some of the traits of a little boy were still his.

Jimmy had it in for the Major, because

he felt that blustering and bluffing did not go with that elderly military gentleman. Wilkes Booth Lincoln had been more than pleased to report the conversation the Major had with them on the subject of Jimmy and his tendencies to exaggeration, and it had been a sore spot in the little fellow's heart ever since.

"Mr. Maje done said you is so fraish dat Billy an' me mus' salt you down 'fo' we kin put any 'liance on yo' word," the colored boy said.

"Who keers what he says?" was Jimmy's pert rejoinder, although he well knew that the one person who did care and care very much was James Lafayette Garner.

The Major was unfailingly kind to his little neighbor, including him in all the treats. But his manner to him was a little overdone in courtesy, and what infuriated Jimmy most was that he would address him

as, "Mr. Garner," and ask him how his wife was.

"I wish Miss Minerva would 'vorce him," he would say bitterly to himself on these occasions. "All time struttin' 'roun' like a ol' turkey gobbler, jes' as pompous in the back as he is in the front!"

Winter had passed, spring had come, and now before they knew it, it was barefoot time and strawberry time. Aunt Cindy was busy with jam. The Big Four and One More, the name given the children since Wilkes Booth Lincoln came to town, were helping cap the berries, a task in which they delighted, as it entailed much taking of toll, every third berry at least finding its way to an open mouth.

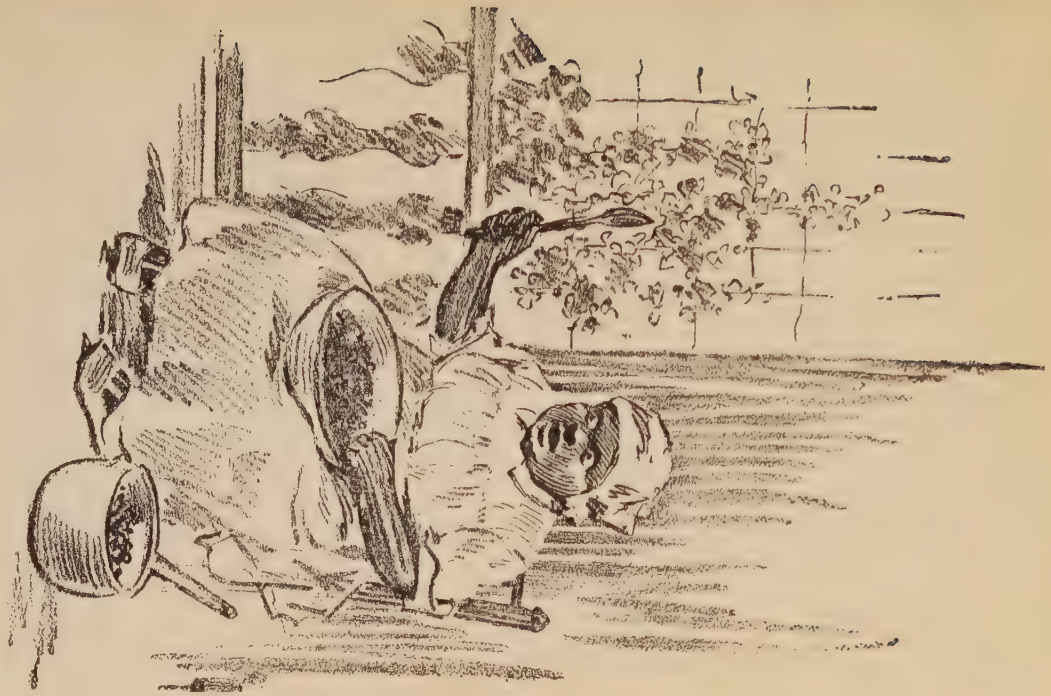
"You, Wilkes Booth Lincoln! Stop dat eatin'! Ain't I done tol' you not to put nothin' in yo' black mouf but rotten ones," admonished Aunt Cindy, who sat with feet

far apart and a huge yellow bowl squeezed between her fat knees.

The berry capping was being done on the beloved porch, where already its proud owner had persuaded a Dorothy Perkins rose to begin to climb at one end and a gourd vine at the other.

"Th' ain't nothin' lak a gou'd vine ter gib satisfaction," she would say. "Evy sence de time er Jonah whin he wa'n't contint ter set at home under his gou'd vine, but mus' go a galavantin' off ter Ninevah whar a whale done et him up under, de gou'd is been de saftes' place fer folks ter set." Then she would show her fine, new, gold front tooth and smile happily.

The bowls were filling in spite of the heavy toll exacted by the cappers. Some of the jam was cooking, and every few moments Aunt Cindy would waddle across the yard to the kitchen to stir and skim.



"Bring us some skimmin's, Aunt Cindy," shouted Billy, and then the old woman came back with a broken saucer filled with the sweet, sticky, foamy skimmings dear to the palate of youth.

Skimmings are supposed to be composed of the impurities in the fruit and sugar, and there are children who have never been allowed to eat of this dainty, but those children never had an Aunt Cindy to cook at their house, poor things!

Miss Minerva had given the cooking entirely over to Aunt Cindy. Gradually she had relinquished much of the housekeeping, even relying upon the old woman to do some of the ordering of provisions. She had found the more she trusted Aunt Cindy the better she liked it, and the more satisfactory were the results. The mistress of the house now came seldom to the kitchen, but spent most of her time sewing.

Billy could hardly believe his eyes when he saw that Aunt Cindy was to have entire charge of the strawberry jam. He remembered well the year before that Aunt Minerva had made quite a rite of the preserving of strawberries. Much weighing and measuring had gone on, and when he talked to his aunt in the midst of her calculations she had to begin all over. Aunt Cindy never weighed or measured anything, but just dumped in berries and sugar in a happy-go-lucky manner, but things came out all right.

"Now, clar out, all er you pidgy pies!" exclaimed Aunt Cindy. "De berries is done capped an' I mus' be thinkin' 'bout puttin' down some Sally Lum for Marse Major's supper."

"Can't we play on yo' po'ch?" asked Billy.

"Sho, honey, you kin play wherever you alls pleases. But don't scratch up the paint on my po'ch."

"We won't," declared the children.

"Le's play circus! I'm so stiff from a settin' still so long," said Jimmy, kicking out his fat legs and trying his best to turn a hand spring the way Wilkes Booth Lincoln could.

"All right! I'm gonter be Tight-rope Tilly, of the Air and Spangles," cried Lina, pirouetting gracefully on the railing.

"Don't kick over the skimmin's," cautioned Frances. A saucer of the delectable food had been but recently placed on the railing by Aunt Cindy, but it was too hot to eat and had been left there to cool. "It's the best yet, an' all full of juice down in the bottom."

"Here comes Maje!" shouted Billy. "Maje! Maje! Come to the circus!"

That gentleman was making his way up the street, a smile on his rotund face. It was nice to be married and to be coming

home to such a cheerful welcome as he felt sure awaited him.

"Look how I kin stan' on my haid an' stick my laigs thru the banisters," cried Wilkes Booth Lincoln, anxious to give the Major a good show. He accordingly stood on his woolly head and poked his lean little black legs through the spaces made by the jig-saw banisters.

"I can do that, too," said Billy, immediately following suit.

"Pshaw! That ain't nothin' to do," declared Jimmy, aroused now to competition. "I kin do that backwards."

Down he went on his round head and with his back to the railing poked his chubby legs through. Surely it was a great circus trick. The Major applauded as he came up.

"Fine, fine!" shouted the audience.

It was a difficult position to hold and the fat legs began to slip. Jimmy extricated one

of them, but the other squeezed itself too far down the crack.

"I'm stuck! Pull me out!" he yelled.

All the circus actors came to his assistance, but the plump limb only got more tightly wedged.

"Stop! You all time breakin' my neck tryin' to get my leg out."

"Where's the saw?" the Major demanded.

"In the wood-house, Mr. Maje," and Wilkes Booth Lincoln ran to do his master's bidding.

"Don't you saw it off, no! Don't you dare saw it off!" cried Jimmy, tugging desperately for relief.

"I won't hurt you," laughed the Major. "You just hold still."

"I won't hold still! Don't you saw it off!" Jimmy bellowed lustily. The Major did not understand that the funny little boy thought all the time that he meant to saw off his leg,

and Jimmy was yelling so loudly that his words were not distinguishable.

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was back in a jiffy with the saw.

"Now hold still!" sternly admonished the Major.

"I ain't a gonter! I'm gonter kick you in the stomic if I kin."

"Why, Mr. Garner! What will your wife think? If you don't look out you will break your neck right before her eyes."

Frances and Lina giggled delightedly. Lina pirouetted along the railing the better to view the operation. The Major began to saw, Jimmy kicking like a mule all the time, with every kick wedging his poor fat leg farther down.

"I have seen a wounded soldier have both legs sawed off making less ado than you are making, Mr. Garner."

Jimmy was painfully still while the Ma-

jor steadily sawed the banister. Suddenly Lina got too close to the saucer of hot skimmings and over it went on Jimmy's bare leg just as the saw reached the crucial point where the leg could be extricated. A purple-faced Jimmy rolled over on the floor.

"It's bloody! It's bloody!" he screamed. "You all time sawin' off little boys' legs." He sat up and looked at his feet, anguish depicted all over his face. He wiggled his toes and then carefully drew his feet up. His leg was not sawed off after all. Wasn't that red stuff blood? The truth dawned on him.

"Hot skimmin's," he said gently and began to lick his knee.

Jimmy's screams had brought Miss Minerva and Aunt Cindy hurriedly from the house.

"Don't be agitated, I beg of you," said the Major. "It is nothing but Jimmy, who got his leg stuck in the banister, and when

said I must saw it off, he thought I meant his leg instead of the banister."

"Well, I think that's a plenty a' ter spar'," declared Aunt Cindy. "My po'ch is done ruint, an' I ain't got but one. Jimmy hyar air got two laigs an' he much better er parted wif one."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAJOR'S GALLANTRY

THE goat was feeling his oats. The more he ate the more unruly he became and his appetite was enormous. When his rations were cut down, by the advice of Sam Lamb, he filled up on anything that he could find in the yard or on the porch. The door mat was the first to go; and then two of the Major's white vests that Aunt Cindy had hung on the line to bleach. A tire off Billy's beloved bicycle was next to find its way down the maw of the insatiate monster.

"I gonter gib yer some dried apples an' den let you fill yo' fool se'f up full er water, an' I hope ter Gawd 'twill bus' you open," declared Aunt Cindy, as she rescued her clean gingham apron. "Hyar you dong

chaw up de string off'n my apron. You's as vexatious to try ter lib wif as ol' Jimmy-jawed Jupiter. He war always a chawin', but I gib it to him he did spit, too—you ol' heathen jes' swallows all you chaws."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was the only person to whom the goat showed any respect. He seemed to have a certain fondness for Billy, but he would not let him harness him. The little colored boy could catch him and put the bit in his mouth when even Sam Lamb had been forced to give up.

In spite of his naughtiness Billy adored his William Goat. The animal had times of being extremely docile. He would go for days without doing a single thing out of the way; then he would suddenly break out, and would begin by eating everything he could find; then start in on one of his butting sprees. Nothing but Wilkes Booth Lincoln was sacred to him. Aunt Cindy hated the

creature, and indeed she had good cause, as time and again he had made her run for her life. Her fat back seemed to be an irresistible target for William.

"You ol' proudified debble!" she would cry. "You done sot yo'se'f up ter be as big as yo' maker, who de good book says ain't no inspector er pussons. You'd butt de Major an' Miss Minerva if you got de chanct."

The chance soon presented itself. Miss Minerva was always very particular about the kind of wood that she bought. It must be oak and pine mixed, and must be sawed the proper length, and split the proper size. A load had just been put in the wood-house and she felt called upon to inspect it.

"I wouldn't come out here in de hot sun, Miss Minerva," said Aunt Cindy, ever solicitous of her mistress. "De wood is good enough fer town wood, 'cep'n th' ain't no

light wood in it. I ain't nebber seed no light wood in town yit. Looks lak th' ain't no heart to town pine."

But Miss Minerva must come see for herself. In the corner of the wood-house was kept one barrel with the goat's oats and another with his chopped food. These were always carefully covered, and the door locked, for well they knew that William Goat, if he once found his way to the source of his supplies, would not stop until he had munched the last grain.

All unsuspecting of danger Miss Minerva and Aunt Cindy stood in the shady wood-house and inspected the neat pile of oak and pine mixed.

"Very nice!" said Miss Minerva, "and put away exactly as I like it."

"I done stood over dat nigger an' seed to it," declared Aunt Cindy. "He said he wa'n't no brick layer an' wanted ter th'ow it in any

ol' way, but I done let him know dat dey wa'n't no dime a comin' his way 'lessen he could pile dat wood up decen' like."

The two women turned to go back to the house, but in the doorway stood the goat. He was wiggling his whiskers in the ominous manner that boded no good, and on his countenance was that evil smile.

"Shoo! Shoo! You ol' lim' er Satan!" and Aunt Cindy waved her apron at the intruder.

He refused to shoo, but advanced one step instead.

"Go away!" said Miss Minerva sternly.

The goat advanced another step. His whiskers were quivering convulsively. Aunt Cindy reached for a piece of wood, but the enemy lowered his head and started towards her. The old woman jumped back.

"My Gawd, Miss Minerva, don't you reckon we kin git up de ladder inter de

lof'?" But the goat seemed to divine their intention, and smiling evilly, whisked himself between them and their avenue of escape.

"Lawsamussy, Miss Minerva, I wouldn't a had dis happen fer nothin'. Ifn I thought 't would do any good I'd let de ol' debble butt me ter Kingdom Come, but it wouldn't he'p none. He'd jes' start in on you whin he got th'ough wif me. One thing, he shan't git you 'til he's kilt me. Dat's all I kin do. Thank Gawd, Marse Maje's dinner is on!"

"Thank you, Aunt Cindy, thank you!" was all poor Miss Minerva could say. Aunt Cindy put her behind the feed barrels and stood guard.

The goat walked up and down in front of them like a sentinel. Sometimes he would lower his head as though getting ready to butt—then he seemed to think it would be more fun to go on scaring the women folks a

little while longer, so he would resume his march back and forth. At each turn he came a bit closer.

"Le's holler as loud as we kin," suggested Aunt Cindy.

Together they called for help, but nobody heard them. They could hear Sarah Jane in Mrs. Garner's kitchen lifting up her voice in mighty song, which was proof positive that Mrs. Garner was not at home. Billy and Jimmy and Wilkes Booth Lincoln were off on their wheels, and it was not time for the Major to come home to dinner.

"Listen to dat 'ere fool nigger a splittin' her gullet a singin' hymns. She'd better stop long enough ter listen ter her neighbors in distress. Hi, dere! Sary Jane! Help! Help!"

But Sarah Jane was just in the midst of a long camp-meeting hymn that had need for concentration, and she never stopped

once. They could hear the words chanted in her powerful contralto—

Dan'el's in de lion's den—
Ain't dat good news?
Put in dere by sinful men—
Ain't dat good news?

"They's mos' a hun'erd verses ter dat hymn an' she is jes in de shank er de chune. Th' ain't no hope fer us from Sary Jane," wailed Aunt Cindy.

Every time they spoke the goat came a little nearer. They found silence was the best policy for them to pursue.

"Try giving him a little feed," whispered Miss Minerva.

Aunt Cindy scattered a handful of oats on the floor. William munched it with delight, but as soon as he ate it he lowered his head and with a terrifying "B-a-a!" made for his benefactress.

"Some more! Some more!" cried Miss Minerva.

For one solid hour those two women were in durance vile, Miss Minerva barricaded behind the barrels and Aunt Cindy doling out oats to the rapacious William. He was most exacting in his demands, and if the old woman scattered the feed too much he would make a pass at her that would scare her to death. She learned to pour it out in little piles, which seemed to satisfy his satanic majesty.

Dinner time, and the Major on his way home! What is that which greets his nostrils as he approaches the pleasant white house with its green shuttered windows? A mixture of burnt vegetables with scorched soup rising supreme.

"Minerva!" he called. "My dear, where are you?"

Where could she be? Miss Minerva was

always in her proper place at meal times, and at all other times, in fact.

"Cindy! Aunt Cindy!"

Nothing alive in the house but odors, and they were very lively.

The Major made his way back to the kitchen. It was filled with smoke from the burning food. He ran hastily through the house, going in all the bedrooms to be sure that somebody had not come in and murdered his wife and Aunt Cindy.

"Billy! Billy! Wilkes Booth Lincoln!" he called from the back door of the kitchen. Then he heard a faint and agonized cry from the wood-house.

"Joseph! Joseph! Help!"

"Marse Major! Hurry!"

"B-a-a! B-a-a!"

The intrepid warrior, fighter of Indians and Yankees, hurriedly grabbed a broom from behind the kitchen door and ran to the

assistance of his wife and cook, shouting lustily:

"I'm coming! I'm coming!"

That was where he made a mistake in strategy that was strange for a veteran in

Indian warfare. He should have silently approached the enemy and surprised him from the rear. When William Goat heard his master's voice he stopped munching oats, raised his wicked head and twitched his

goatee. He lowered his head and waited.

Miss Minerva screamed a warning, but it was too late. The Major had to take it—but he had the foresight to turn and take it from the rear. The wicked goat lifted him off his chubby legs, shooting him safely over the walk plump onto the soft green lawn.

Then Miss Minerva fainted.

The Major wasn't hurt a bit. At least, he said he wasn't. After it was all over, and Dr. Sandford had come and pronounced Miss Minerva all right—had given her a dose of aromatic ammonia, and prescribed less goat and more rest for that lady—Aunt Cindy noticed that her master wouldn't sit down to eat the little cold lunch she fixed for him (hot dinner being entirely burnt up), but that he put his plate and glass on the mantel piece and ate standing.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RESPECTABLE GOAT

"MARSE MAJOR, as a Christian 'oman I's boun' ter tell you sompen."

"What is it, Aunt Cindy?" asked the Major, as he finished his buffet luncheon.

"Dat ol' goat done got back in de woodhouse an' 'bout finished up de oats an' begun on de chop' feed. We alls was so tuck up wif Miss Minerva we ain't never thunk ter lock de do'."

"Well, I don't think that makes much difference, Aunt Cindy. I am so glad you and Miss Minerva are not hurt — nothing else really matters."

" 'Taint de feed I'm thinkin' 'bout; it's dat ol' debble hisse'f. He is pretty near

bus'in' wide open, an' if he ain't driv, an' driv hard, he'll be a daid goat in no time. I mos' wisht I wa'n't no Christian, 'cause I sho do think de worl' would be better off if dat William Goat would leave it, but bein' as it is Billy's goat an' yo' prop'ty I feel it is my dooty ter inform you dat he is sho foundered hisse'f. When a critter gits foundered on oats dey is nothin' fer it but wuck him hard."

The Major laughed.

"It is hard to have Christian sentiments towards a goat. I almost wish you hadn't told me—but now that I know, I reckon it is up to me to see that he is exercised."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was called to hitch up William. Jimmy was asked to accompany them on this ride of mercy. The three boys started with a seemingly docile and very fat goat. His sides were distended almost to the bursting point.

"You get in the back, Jimmy," Billy had

suggested as Jimmy started to clamber to the front seat. "You're so fat it don't give me elbow room to drive an' this goat is mighty rampagious to-day."

"Aw, shucks! I'm all time havin' to set in the back," grumbled Jimmy, but he obeyed the coachman. "I know what I'm gonter play: I'm gonter be a rich gen'leman, jes' as rich as greases, an' I'm out drivin' with my coach an' fo'. That ol' goat is fo' prancin' steeds, an' you an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln is my servants. You ain't nothin' but a coachman an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln ain't nothin' but a footman. I'm gonter take the air in style."

"All right, sir," said Billy, entering into the spirit of the game. "Where shall I drive, sir?"

"O, take me to my plantation. I reckon I'll go down an' see how my estate is comin' on. I'm gettin' in a million bales of cotton

to be shipped down the river—an'—my corn is done growed as high as trees."

"What is a footmens?" asked Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

"He's the servant what always haster walk, but I is so kind an' good a master I lets my footman ride."

Wilkes Booth Lincoln was duly grateful for this favor.

"Make my fo' hosses gee up!" cried the rich man.

"Gee up, William!" and Billy got out his whip and gave the goat a smart rap. William Goat stopped stock still for a moment while he turned his head and looked searchingly in the faces of the children.

"Look out, Billy! He wuckin' he whiskers!" cried the footman anxiously.

"I don't care what he is workin', he's gotter gee up." Billy gave him another sharp crack with the tiny whip.

Such a mad runaway was never seen in the streets of that quiet, peaceful town. It was a miracle how that goat, which had just eaten at least a bushel of oats, could travel as he did. No longer did he trot, but went by leaps and bounds. Billy braced his bare feet against the dashboard and held manfully to the reins. With great adroitness he managed to keep the "four prancing steeds" in the middle of the road.

When Wilkes Booth Lincoln, following the instinct that is in every human breast when being run away with, put his hands on the reins, Billy screamed out sharply:

"Le'go my reins! Don't tech 'em!"

On Billy's countenance was a certain grim joy. Aunt Minerva, had she seen it, would have said: "Just like his father!"

Billy was enjoying himself hugely. A kind of exhilaration filled his soul. What would it not mean if the goat could really

be four prancing steeds? In his heart he thanked Jimmy for starting the game.

For a moment Wilkes Booth Lincoln was scared, but one glance at Billy's face, and after his stern mandate to let go his reins, the little colored boy realized that it was part of the game Billy and the goat were playing, so he settled himself for an enjoyable ride.

But the poor gentleman in the back seat, the gentleman as rich as Croesus, how about him? At William's first bound Jimmy's hat flew off.

"Stop an' lemme git my hat!" he cried. "I mean let my footman get my hat." But once started, there was no stopping.

"Stop, I tell you! You all time whippin' up goats an' loosin' little boys' bes' hats."

"If you is so reech maybe you kin git anudder," ventured the footman between bounds.

Soon Jimmy realized that this was no time for arguing, but merely a time for holding on for dear life. He planted his fat little person in the middle of the seat, and clutching the sides, he gritted his teeth and shut his eyes, sure that the end was near.

But not at all—the end was far from near. The goat ran at least half a mile, taking the road his own sweet will prompted. Billy could steer him just enough to keep from turning over, but the general direction of their travel was in the hands of Fate and William (if William could be said to have hands).

The bounds ceased and the goat began to trot with only an occasional frolicsome jump. Jimmy opened his eyes tentatively.

"Why, there's Tom Collins's house!" he gasped. "We's done come mos' ten miles."

"Whoa! Whoa!" shouted Billy, taking a hitch in his reins and pulling with all his might and main, but the end was not yet.

Tom was installing a brand new water wheel in the little stream at the foot of the hill. When he saw the runaway he shouted a joyful welcome and started after it.

"Ah, I am pursued!" thought William Goat, and getting his second wind, once more he started in with his fancy steps. His leaps were even higher than at the beginning. The little wagon bounced up and down like a bump-the-bumps at the fair. The rich gentleman on the back seat shut his eyes again, prepared for the worse.

William was nearing his home, the only home he had ever known until the Major and Sam Lamb had driven out from town and bought him from old Mrs. Leary. Perhaps even the wicked goat had some softness in his make-up. He may have remembered the days when he was an innocent little kid, before he grew a beard, and when his satanic horns had not sprouted. He may have had

a deep affection for Mrs. Leary, who certainly had always been most kind to him, letting him browse at will on the nearby town dump pile. What did William care for door mats and white vests, no matter if the latter were beautifully starched? What did he care for a whole barrel of oats and chopped feed? He would not give one old tin can for all the riches of Miss Minerva and the Major. When he saw the tumble down house and the weedy yard of Mrs. Leary he literally sang for joy.

"B-a-a! B-a-a!" he cried, and then with a mighty kick he freed himself from the creaking shafts, was over the fence and at work on the weeds before the boys could pick themselves up. The last move on the part of William had upset the little wagon.

"Done got ter yo' plantation, Marse Jimmy," grinned Wilkes Booth Lincoln, "an' dere yo' cotton pickers at wuck!"

WM DONAHEY.

He pointed to the dump heap where the usual rag pickers were busy scratching in the debris.

Billy looked ruefully at the wrecked wagon, while Jimmy felt himself all over carefully to see that there were no bones broken. One wheel of the little wagon was bent under and the shafts were splintered. The dashboard had a hole kicked in it. Jimmy, however, was intact.

Tom came running up in breathless excitement.

"Gee, that was some runaway! That goat certainly can travel. How you gonter get your wagon back home?"

"I reckon we'll have to leave it here and drive William home runnin' along by him," answered Billy.

"Well, I hope he won't go home as fast as he came, then," laughed Tom.

Mrs. Leary came out of her shanty to view

the wreck. Her sympathies seemed to be entirely with the goat.

"An' phwat do ye expict fr-rom a r-r-respictable goa-at whin ye be arfter-r ma-akin' him dr-ra-aw a naygerr. I nivver-r r-raise my goa-ats to no sich tr-r-ade." She looked scornfully at Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

Billy was on the verge of tears. How could anyone speak in such an unkind way of his beloved little colored friend? He looked at him, hoping he had not comprehended, but the little black fellow had not only comprehended, but was not in the least taken aback. He drew himself up with a dignity that might have come from the African kings from whom his grandmother, Aunt Blue-gum Tempy, always boasted she was descended, having heard it from her great-grandmother, who had it straight from her great-grandmother. Billy was astonished and delighted by the spunk

shown by his favorite, who called out in a very saucy tone:

"I had a little dawg an' his name was Dash—
I'd ruther be a nigger dan po' white trash!"

"Git out o'me yarrd!" screamed the old woman. The children flew from the broomstick she waved after them.

When at a safe distance Billy called back respectfully:

"Please, ma'am, but Wilkes Booth Lincoln, what is a little colored boy an' no nigger at all—he is the only one what kin manage the goat—an' won't you please let him come in and catch him, so we can lead him back to town?"

"I will not."

"But how kin we get him?"

"Best you can, but no naygerr is arfterr coomin' on me primises."

"She always acts that way about colored

folks," said Tom, who had lived as neighbor to Mrs. Leary long enough to know all her idiosyncrasies.

"Maybe we'd better take the waggin to yo' house Tom, an' jes' go on an' leave William 'til Maje kin sen' for him," said Billy sadly.

"How kin we walk home?" wailed Jimmy. "You all time bringin' little fat boys off in billy goat carts, an' losin' they bes' hats, an' runnin' away, an' turnin' them over, an' mos' breakin' they necks, an' then 'spec'in' 'em to walk home. I betcher it's mo'n twenty miles home."

The other boys laughed.

"If it's dat fur I reckon we'd bes' be puttin' our foot in de pike an' startin'," said Wilkes Booth Lincoln.

"Here comes a guano cart, it don't smell no worser than a goat, le's hook a ride!" cried Jimmy.

Tom promised to pull the wagon to safety in his yard, and the three other boys climbed on the back of the bad smelling guano cart, which obligingly took them right by home.

Billy was very quiet for the rest of the day. Aunt Minerva had been put to bed by the doctor, and cautioned to stay there until all of the excitement incident to the goat had worn off. Not a sound must be made in the house. He curled up in one of the Major's big leather chairs and gave himself up to thought. He longed for the Major. He wanted a man-to-man talk. He knew Aunt Cindy wouldn't understand, and even Wilkes Booth Lincoln he felt would lack the sympathetic comprehension that he craved.

His old friend was home at last. Supper was disposed of and Billy felt he could have his talk. He was secretly glad Miss

Minerva was out of the way. He felt sorry she was ill enough to be in bed, but there were times when a fellow didn't want any women folks around.

"Maje, I's feelin' mighty bad 'bout my William Goat."

"Yes, my son, it is too bad."

"He's acted up scan'lous—but Maje—when folks—an' animals is folks—when folks love you, an' you love folks, you kin forgive 'em mos' anything, can't you, Maje?"

"Yes, Billy!"

"But, Maje, what is a worryin' me—an' I been a studyin' 'bout it ever since William done runned away—is that William Goat don't love me, an' he ain't never loved me. I don't believe he is got no nachel 'fection for nobody."

"What makes you think he doesn't love you?" asked the Major, looking preter-

naturally solemn in his endeavor not to smile. "Horses often run away even when they love their drivers."

"But if a horse ever looked at me the way William did jes' before he began to run, I'd know that horse didn't love me. Oh, Maje, he did look at me so cross an' hateful, an' when he kicked in the dash-board an' lit out over the fence, he looked at me again, an' I jes' know he hates me. An', Maje, I don't take no pleasure no mo' in ownin' a animal what ain't got no nachel 'fections—nothin' but a smell an' a butt."

Billy's eyes were full of tears and his mouth was trembling. The Major drew him to his knee and put his arm around him. If he and Billy did have a tacit agreement not to kiss, they could at least have an occasional hugging when no women folks were around. Billy snuggled up close to his partner.

"It is hard, old man, to lavish affection on anything with no return. Don't you think you might win his love if you had another try?" asked the Major.

"No, sir, I'm sure I can't. You see, goats is diffun't from women folks. I know you used to feel 'bout Aunt Minerva jes' the way I feel 'bout William Goat—that she wasn't never gonter love you, but you see all the time Aunt Minerva had nachel 'fections, an' jes' as soon as she got over her 'jections to pants she bus' loose and let her nachel 'fections out. But William Goat ain't got no 'fections to let out."

"Perhaps not!" and the Major smiled. "I'm glad you have come to this conclusion about the goat anyhow, Billy, because I don't think he is safe to have around, for a while at least. How would you like me to get you a pony?"

"Oh, Maje, Maje! You is better than Santy Claus. Won't Aunt Minerva raise 'jections?"

"Oh, no, I guess not. I think your Aunt Minerva's ideas have grown."

"An' you said we'd make the stable big in case our ijears grew, an' now they've done growed. A pony will love me as much as I love him, won't he?"

"I am sure he will."

CHAPTER XIX

MISS MINERVA'S BABY

BILLY had spent a restless night. He had dreamed a great deal, and had been conscious of movement through the house, and of strange unaccustomed sounds. In the morning he felt as though he had not been asleep at all, and still he realized that he had not really awakened once during the night, as he could not remember anything. There seemed to be an unrest in the household that had found its way even through his closed door. And why was his door closed? He had certainly gone to bed with it open. Aunt Minerva had always liked to have him sleep with his door open so she could hear him in the night if he needed anything.

Billy lay in his little white bed and tried to remember all the strange dreams he had had. One dream had been a bad one about his beloved pony. He thought he had grown horns, and his gentle face had taken on an expression of hate like the bad old goat's. The pony had been in the stable now for some weeks, and had turned out to be as kind and lovable and loving as William Goat had been hateful. Billy could saddle him and bridle him himself, and the little creature was so gentle that even Aunt Minerva would rub his nose and give him sugar.

"Can't be nothin' the matter with my pony, the reason all the folks is scurryin' 'roun' so," Billy said to himself, as he rubbed his eyes.

Suddenly a strange sound fell on his ear. Billy bounced out of bed. Something had happened to his pony and they

were keeping it from him. Again that sound!

"Ponies don't whinny that-a-way," he comforted himself by declaring, as he hastily donned his clothes.

"Whar you goin', chil'?" demanded Aunt Cindy, as Billy ran through the kitchen.

"I thought I heard my pony a whinnyin'."

"Yo' little hoss is all right, honey." Aunt Cindy looked tired, but her countenance was beaming with delight.

"But what's that I hear?"

"Billy, de angels done brung yo' Aunt Minerva a little baby las' night."

"Oh, g'long, Aunt Cindy! This ain't no April Fool's day."

"I don't know what day 'tis, but they is a baby in yander. Jes' listen!"

Again the strange sound.

"Aunt Cindy, is that a baby?"

"Sho, honey!"

"Oughtn't they grease him or something? He's so squeaky. I's sho glad God done sent Aunt Minerva a baby. I useter pray for him to send her one, but I done give up lately, an' jes' kinder lef' it to the Lord."

"The Major is sho a proud father," said Aunt Cindy, as she hastily rolled out biscuit for a quick breakfast.

"Father! Major ain't no father," said Billy quickly. "He calls me son, but he ain't sho nuf my father."

"But he is this little new baby's own pappy," laughed the old woman.

"Oh!" was Billy's only remark as he ran from the kitchen.

Back into his own room he flew, and throwing himself down by the bed, he gave himself up to a storm of tears. Billy sel-

dom cried, but on this occasion he made up for lost time. Sobs shook his slender frame and tears enough were shed to wet his counterpane. When he could control himself he began to pray, and as was his custom, he prayed aloud. He did not hear the Major's soft tread as he came down the hall, nor did he know that his old friend stood in the doorway while he wrestled in prayer.

"Oh God, I's 'preciative of yo' answerin' my prayer an' sendin' Aunt Minerva a baby, an' I hope it's a girl baby so she kin learn it to sew an' churn, but, dear Lord, they is been a mistake somewhere 'cause I ain't never meant for you to make Maje a pappy. I been a 'lowin' 'cause I didn't have no father of my own, an' Maje didn't have no son, that somehow we could do for each other. But Aunt Cindy is done tol' me that Maje is th' father of this here baby

what is makin' sech a unearthly soun'. Oh, Lord, make me to bear this trouble what is come upon me. If Maje is proud of bein' a father, let me be good an' take my med'cine like a man. I oughtener a prayed for Aunt Minerva to have a baby if'n I didn't want my prayers to come true. I take the blame, an' Lord, let me be good about it. I somehow never thought about the Major bein' mixed up in it none. Make me be kind an' good to the little devil, even if'n it's a boy. Make me let him ride my bicycle an' even my pony. Don't let the Major stop lovin' me a little bit even if he is a really, truly father."

Billy arose from his knees. He felt calmer and happier. His cry had done him good and his earnest prayer had helped him even more. He turned and saw his old friend standing in the doorway.

"Hello, Maje! I's mighty glad you is

got a baby of yo' own, an' I gonter be good to it," he said manfully. The two males shook hands.

"I have two children now, Billy, a son and a daughter."

"Is it a girl baby?"

"Yes, a little girl! Don't you want to see it?"

"I reckon so," said Billy dubiously. "I do hope it is prettier than it sounds, Maje."

"Ahem, well you see, Billy, babies are not so very pretty just at first," apologized the fond father. "She will be much prettier in a few days, they tell me. Your Aunt Minerva wants to see you. She has asked for you again and again."

"Well, now, that's mighty sweet of Aunt Minerva, when she has got a kid of her own. Maje, don't you reckon we kin call this here baby William, so I kin be Billy even to Aunt Minerva?"

"But, Billy, it's a girl."

"Oh, that's so!"

Aunt Minerva was lying in her snowy bed, while a strange young woman in apron and cap was busying herself around the

room as though it belonged to her. By Aunt Minerva's side was a tiny white bundle, covered lightly with something that Billy remembered vaguely having seen Aunt Minerva sewing.

Billy dutifully kissed his aunt, and

then turned shyly to see the baby. The nurse put back a corner of the cover and Billy eagerly peeped in.

"Golly Moses! That ain't her, is it?" was his involuntary exclamation; but Billy was born with tact, and a great pity for Miss Minerva and the Major seized him. Maybe they didn't know how red and ugly the baby was, and it was not his part to enlighten them.

"She sho do smell good—like vi'lets. What you gonter call her, Aunt Minerva?"

"Josephine, after her father," and Aunt Minerva beckoned Billy to her. She took his hand in hers. "Billy, I want you to look upon this little girl as your own sister. Did you understand me, Billy—your sister?"

Billy gasped. Aunt Minerva had actually called him Billy—called him Billy twice, right close together. She evidently

meant it, as she smiled right in his eyes when she said it. Suddenly a strange sensation came over the little boy. He could remember his mother, not as a picture as heretofore, but as a reality.

"Why, Aunt Minerva, you look jes' like my mother!"

"Oh, Billy, but your mother was young and pretty!"

"So are you, Aunt Minerva, an'—an' I didn't know it 'til jes' now. I reckon if the angels would bring you two or three mo' babies, an' maybe twinses, you'd be a young lady again."

The nurse and the Major laughed and Miss Minerva blushed.

Billy hunted up Jimmy as soon as he could get his breakfast. Lina and Frances hurried over as soon as they heard Billy whistling for his chum.

"The angels brought Aunt Minerva a

baby las' night, an' they lef' their saddle-bags in the hall."

Billy's information fell like a bomb among the children.

"Aw, what yer givin' us?" was Jimmy's way of greeting the news. "You know th' ain't no baby to yo' house."

"Cross-my-heart-an'-wish-I-may-die!" declared Billy, suiting the action to the word.

"Well, if that ain't a dirty trick! You done got a pony, too. I don't care! I don't want no boys to my house to lose my ball an' wear my new pants an' everything."

"But this here is a girl baby."

"Well, we might a knowed it! Miss Minerva wouldn't 'liberately have no boy. Miss Minerva's all time havin' girl babies."

"Oh, I'm so glad. Maybe when it gets over the limbernecks, what is most gen-

erally the case with little babies, Miss Minerva will let us wheel it out," was Lina's ecstatic cry.

"It's a turrible lookin' thing right now," Billy confided to his friends. "Of course I ain't never seed a white folks' baby befo' when it was so teensy. I done seed lots er Peruny Pearline's babies, an' they are real cute when they are jes' born. They look kinder like choclut drops, only they smell like doodle-bugs. But this here baby of Aunt Minerva's is as red as a tomato, an' it smells like vi'lets. I wisht it looks as good as it smells. She an' Maje is plum daffy 'bout it. Aunt Cindy says it ain't no redder than what I was, but she is jes' a jokin' me."

"I reckon the Major is all time havin' red Injun babies 'cause he done fit Injuns so much," ventured Jimmy.

"Well, whatever color she is, she is my

little sister, 'cause Aunt Minerva done said so, an' when she gets big enough I'm gonter ride her on my handle bars, an' let her take two turns on my pony to my one. I'm 'sponsible for this baby, 'cause I been a prayin' so for her, an' now she is done come, I'm gotter be good to her all my life."

THE END.

MISS MINERVA *and* WILLIAM GREEN HILL

About ten years ago—February 6, 1909, to be exact—this charming classic was published. At once it leaped into popularity. Each year has seen its circle of readers growing steadily wider. Over 200,000 copies have gone out into the world to enchant and delight fun-loving hearts. The 24th edition of "Miss Minerva" now makes its appearance, simultaneously with the publication of the sequel, "Billy and the Major."

If you have read only the last named book, you should by all odds procure a copy of "Miss Minerva and William Green Hill." You will want to know how "Billy," the precocious little orphan boy, came to live with his aunt—how he resisted her attempts to make a girl of him—how his first meeting with the Major warmed and ripened into a close friendship—and how the gallant Major, seizing opportunity by the forelock, brought his courtship of Miss Minerva to a whirlwind conclusion. In ever-delightful fashion, "Miss Minerva" tells the story of the earlier pranks and escapades of Billy and his little friends—one of the most lovable groups of youngsters that grace the pages of fiction.